





LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF

CALIFORNIA

SAN DIEGO

SELF

PR

4529

D25

Q4

1897





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation





THE QUEST OF THE GILT-
EDGED GIRL

Uniform with this

The Happy Hypocrite

By MAX BEERBOHM

Bodley Booklets. No. 1

"Positively rivals the most captivating fairy stories in its charm."—*The Daily Mail*.

"Clever and whimsical to a high degree."
The Globe.

"Mr. Beerbohm is a master of delicate irony, and his work in this 'genre' is very grateful to the palate."

The Whitehall Review.

"Really a fanciful and pretty piece of writing, refreshing to the 'tired men.'"

The Literary World.

"It is something more than well written; it has style. The word 'classic' inevitably suggests itself."—*Vanity Fair*.

"The most delightfully entertaining in design and development of anything of the kind we have had the pleasure of examining."

Belfast News Letter.

The Quest of the Gilt-Edged Girl

BY

RICHARD DE LYRIENNE

Bodley Booklets
No. 2

JOHN LANE, *The Bodley Head*,
London and New York

1897

"Gaudeamus igitur juvenes dum sumus"

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO
At the Ballantyne Press

Advertisement

It is pleasant to be a poet, especially a good-looking poet, with a picturesque name. You will gather as much from my Quest, which may shock the Daily Chronicle, the Saturday Review, and Lady Henry Somerset; but which should make good reading for Max Beerbohm, Herbert Vivian, Marie Lloyd, and the rest of the New Rationalists. You will hear, among other things, how Carrie Morelli and I killed the critic in the Isle of Man; how I visited the Academy for Golden Girls; how I kissed the Lady Doctor when the moonbeams were on the rhododen-

ADVERTISEMENT

drons ; what I saw and did in Thrums ("Heech, mon!"); how the New Brigade of Nineteenth Century Literature dined at the Métropole ; and what Nicolini told me of the "Star" and Garter, particularly the Garter. Dear Nicolini, you are growing a big girl now. I saw you in the Strand to-day, the good old Sala-Dickens Strand. . . . I say no more.

Contents

Chap. I. <i>I Resolve to go on Pilgrimage</i>	Page 9
II. <i>The Why and Wherefore</i>	14
III. <i>The Unpoetic Police</i>	17
IV. <i>In Which I Visit the College for Golden Girls</i>	22
V. <i>I Lecture on Literature</i>	24
VI. <i>How I Kissed the Lady Doctor when the Moonbeams were on the Rhododendrons</i>	28
VII. <i>I go a-Fishing</i>	31
VIII. <i>What Nicolini told me of the Star and Garter</i>	37
IX. <i>Why Nicolini Came</i>	44
X. <i>The Crowning of Verbert</i>	48

CONTENTS

<i>Chap. xi. The Kind of Thing that Happens in the</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Sunday Papers</i>	53
xii. <i>The False Syllogism</i>	58
xiii. <i>Ah!</i>	61
xiv. <i>A Sexagesimal Symposium</i>	62
xv. <i>I Have a Glue</i>	69
xvi. <i>The Glue</i>	73
xvii. <i>After Quillman</i>	80
xviii. <i>The Home of Al</i>	82
xix. <i>How we Killed the Critic</i>	88
xx. <i>Foiled</i>	92
xxi. <i>After the Quest</i>	95
xxii. <i>Not the Gilt-edged Girl</i>	98

Chapter I

I Resolve to go on Pilgrimage

MY mind is made up. It is well for the Poet to appear a bit of a blade in the eyes of the Public. Byron began it. Byron was a gay dog. He sailed pretty near the wind. I will be a gayer dog. I will sail nearer the wind. "Waiter, a Henry Clay in gold paper and another benedictine." The expense? Hang the expense! You see that cheque? Shilling a word ("Shilling a word—Damn, it's absurd. Shilling a letter; come now, that's better," as I recently remarked in a provincial paper), and I can do it by the yard. The guitar, please. Thank you. Have you ever considered the guitar? I did it for the *Star* at threepence a line.

"I sang the gay guitar
For a season in the *Star*,

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

In a twenty-five h.p. poetic vein ;
And its graces manifold
I enrapturedly extolled,
Till Brixton took guitar upon the brain.

But I'm willing any time
To produce in rippling rhyme
A stock of first-class instrumental lays ;
If my editor should want
I am quite prepared to chant
The bagpipes' or the concertina's praise."

I am willing to do a good deal of considering at that figure. The guitar, I gracefully contended, was a gift from heaven. There is no music, I said, like the music of the guitar, its strains reminding me of a bumble-bee dying below a rhubarb leaf. That was a fine image ! O'Connor was editing the *Star* then. He wrote, "It brought tears to my eyes and I thought of dear old Ireland, where the rhubarb blooms as it blooms nowhere else in this wide world. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. God bless you ! Yours truly, T. P." The testimonial was wholly unsolicited ; and he added that I was at liberty to make whatever use of it I thought fit. Dear old T. P. ! He has fallen out

sadly of late. Hasn't got a French name, doesn't get photographed often enough. . . . Eight o'clock. It is a saffron evening. Spring has leapt upon the metropolis like a chamois. There are roses in St. John's Wood. Several kinds of roses. I sit by the Club window. My white vest takes the evening sun, and glows with the incandescence of the midwinter Matterhorn. By the Park railings, a jingling piano-organ unwinds the latest song of the street. My heart is filled with ineffable content. In a twenty minutes' stroll this afternoon, I counted thirty portraits of myself and only two of Algernon. "Waiter, the same again, please." Let me see who were in the race with me? Swinburne, Davidson, Morris, Dobson, Watson—damned, all damned: I was the man who saw the iron lilies in the Strand. Worth a guinea a box—I mean, a guinea a thought.

"Where are they, my rhyming brothers,
Have they sought another zone?
What has happened to the others,
That poor Dicky chirps alone?
Why this sad obliteration?
Is the good old Swinburne swing

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Closed up for alliteration
And repair until the Spring?

Davidson was disappointed
(So the scribblers say in town),
When the Laureate was appointed,
Still, he's written 'For the Crown.'
Alfred Austin has been chary
And his output sadly small,
But he'll work for his Canary
At the Sexagesimal.

Watson damned at Abdul daily,
But the Public turned at last ;
Dobson drummed out verses gaily—
Then their little day was past.
I alone, with glory covered,
Tower above the played-out band—
I, De Lyrienne, who discovered
Iron lilies in the Strand."

Good i' faith, but the time has come for me to quit Olympus and seek the Gilt-edged Girl. My apartments in Blythe Road, West Kensington, have lost much of their charm since the Gaiety girl upstairs went on the South African circuit. I miss the tiny slipper, I miss the open-work stocking, I miss the straw-

coloured hair that reminded me of the old haymaking days in dreamy Sussex. Ah, Melanie, you were a poppy, a comet, a star, a muscatel. I made £16 worth of poetry out of you. Now you are on board Kipling's *Barralong*, ploughing its swinging way beneath the Southern Cross. Remember me to Kruger. Tell him that if he tries any more humour I will put him in one of my poems. "Waiter, bring me a Welsh-rabbit, a bottle of Chianti, and a silver fork." Good-night. The Quest begins to-morrow.

Chapter II

The Why and Wherefore

IT has long been my idea to go in quest of something or other that would be productive of copy.

It was in a strange musty document found in my rooms the night before last that I first heard of the Gilt-edged Girl. She is anonymous, and the pleasant-sounding name is my own invention. £30,000, that is the fortune; and the strawberry-mark is on her left shoulder. A Quest involves a pilgrimage of some kind or other, and Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and R. I. Stevenson's *With a Donkey in the Cevennes* contain many useful wrinkles as to how to write the thing up. And M^{énie} Muriel Dowie, who "discovered" the Carpathians; I can learn something from her.

I started to-day at 9 A.M. It is now 7.30 P.M., and I find myself ensconced beside a comfortable whisky-and-

soda in the Black Bull, Someplace. It has been a trying time, and my troubles are not done yet.

It was a clear, sparkling May morning when I set out. The yellow-hammer and the chaffinch (good old chaffinch! I got him in Nicholson's *Manual of Zoology*) made merry music—the orchestra of ornithology—and the harpsichord tinkle of the brook suggested that life was worth living. I approached a back-green, wherein hung many mysterious articles of feminine attire. A stocking, a petticoat, and a pair of stays. Oh, my poetic soul, De Lyrienne! For each, I imagined an owner, fair as the Levant and charming as the première danseuse at the Empire Music Hall. And particularly did my eyes rest upon the stays. Surely here I had an item that could belong to none save the Gilt-edged Girl. Instinctively I felt this. I had with me the Gladstone bag, that, regardless of political feelings, I had borrowed from William Watson, and I noted that there was room in its interior for the stays. I approached, reached out my hand, and was about to place the “take” in the bag, when a vigorous arm gripped me by the shoulder. I looked up. “Your name, young man,” said the constabulary

owner of the arm. "De Lyrienne," said I. "Ah well," said he, "we can't have this sort of thing ; it's getting far too common." And he jotted down my name in connection with a common charge of attempted theft. I bailed myself out by the deposition of two golden guineas—or sovereigns rather, for the unpoetic age has abolished the guinea—and sought refuge in my hotel to mourn the Spirit of the Day.

Here was I, a fanciful adventurer, charged with the spirit of romance, run in on a common accusation of attempted theft. Bah ! My blood boiled. "Have we lost the mood romantic that was ever ours from birth ?" I'm afraid so.

My summons advises me to be in court by 9 A.M. to-morrow. Bah !

Chapter III

The Unpoetic Police

I TAKE the report of the trial from the *Hertfordshire Hoot*. This will save me writing a chapter.

A POET AT THE POLICE COURT

ACTUATED BY A SPIRIT OF ROMANCE, HE TOOK THE
STAYS

At the Primrose Bloom Police-court yesterday, Judge Ferntowers on the Bench, Richard De Lyrienne, describing himself as a poet, was charged with the theft of a pair of stays from a back-green in Hawthorn Lane, Primrose Bloom. The prisoner, who did not appear to feel his position at all, pleaded not guilty, but said that the case was not one of common theft.

Judge Ferntowers. Not what ?

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Prisoner. Not one of common theft. I am at present on a quest. (Laughter.)

The Judge. Aha ! You're on a quest, are you ? Does your mother know you're out ? (Loud laughter.)

Prisoner remarked that judicial buffoonery commanded his sincerest sympathy.

The Judge. Have a care, sir. I may commit you for contempt of Court. Call Police-Inspector Rhymer.

Police-Inspector Rhymer deponed that he had charge of the case. He had had his eye on the accused all the afternoon of the theft. Prisoner looked about suspiciously. He saw him bag the stays. Prisoner told him he was actuated by a spirit of romance, taking the stays because he thought he would like to know the owner. (Laughter.)

The Judge. He what ?

The Inspector. He would like to know the owner, your honour. He says he is on a quest—the quest of the Gilt-edged Girl, his affinity.

The Judge (facetiously). Is he gilt ?

The Inspector (humorously). No ; guilty, I should say.

THE UNPOETIC POLICE

The Judge. He says he is a poet ; you do a little in that line yourself, Inspector, don't you ?

The Inspector. I do : I wrote " Hail, smiling Spring," in last week's *Hoot*, and——

The Judge (interrupting). That'll do. You have seen some of the prisoner's work ?

The Inspector denied this.

Mr. Henry Harland, sworn for the prosecution, deponed that the accused wrote poetry for the *Yellow Book*. Witness understood that he (accused) had dedicated a poem to him (witness).

Cross-examined. He bore accused no animus.

By the Court. He admitted the authorship of a book entitled *Red Leeks*. It was not a botanical book. He had never seen a red leek.

Mr. Max Beerbohm, cautioned to tell the truth—the Judge remarking that he was too young to take the oath—said he had written " Works."

Judge. You what ?

Witness. Written " Works," my lord.

The Judge. That'll do. Next witness, please.

Mr. Eric Mackay, describing himself as a poet, was sworn for the defence. He said he knew the Prisoner

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

slightly. Defendant was a respectable man, but romantic. All the members of the Logroliad, a business club, knew of the Quest. De Lyrienne hoped to make money out of it by writing it up, and witness had no doubt he would.

Cross-examined for the prosecution, Mr. Mackay admitted that he knew Miss Carrie Morelli.

Constable Cluc said the stays were taken from a green behind a vacant cottage. The neighbours could not account for the presence of any articles there. Prisoner was arrested because it was known that the stays did not belong to him anyhow. (Laughter.)

Judge Ferntowers said it was a curious case. Nobody claimed the stays. The case therefore fell to the ground. He accordingly dismissed the accused, warning him to be more careful in the future, and suggesting that he should take up some honest employment.

The accused thanked his honour, and asked if, seeing that the stays belonged to no one, he could buy them.

The Judge said the Inspector could settle that. The money might go to Traill's Home for Minor Poets.

THE UNPOETIC POLICE

Accused left the bar humming the air of "My Queen" waltz.

.

Ah ! the public, the sordid, prosaic, grovelling public. Oh, the Law, the stupid, inane, drivelling Law. A fig for both ! I have the stays, and here I am again on the long trail, the old trail, the out trail, the trail that is always cheap. It is evening—a symphony in saffron and pink. A nascent star twinkles over Nowhere.

"The road is dry
And so am I—"

These rhymes, these rhymes. Cloop ! They do cork that Moselle beautifully. Your health, old world, your health. Most excellent. . . . Who invented drink ? . . . I don't remember ever having seen a statue to him anywhere. . . . I must write to the *Daily Telegraph* about that.

Chapter IV

In Which I Visit the College for Golden Girls

NEXT morning I rose early. At midday I reached the Hermitage, which is a College for Golden Girls, and numbered among its undergraduates one Chloe, who had been at school with my brother. Might she be the Gilt-edged Girl? It is rash to enter into speculative fields : I leave that to philosophers and Captain Coe.

A metal fuchsia was the doorbell. In answer to a tinkle a comely damsel opened the door. She was sveltc, and trim as to the ankles. I gaily tipped her under the chin, having my poet's licence with me in the bag.

"Sir!" she said in indignation.

"Jane," said a sweet voice, and a bow-lipped lady, dreamy, tall, resplendent, and having a figure that

would have charmed Rossetti and Burne-Jones, approached, while my little friend the doorkeeper disappeared, a Catherine Mermet blush on her cheek.

"Oh, sir," said the lady, "you are the examiner?"

"I am," I replied, raising my Homburg hat and stepping inside in order to more conveniently encircle her waist.

"Oh, sir," said the lady, "not now; the Botany class awaits you."

"Any fine girls——"

The lady had gone on ahead.

I followed.

There were thirty girls in the Botany class—the lady doctors of the next decade—and I found that their knowledge of Botany was quite as deep as my own.

"You know the iron lilies of the Strand," I said, in concluding the brief examination; "*liliacea Lyriennensis*?"

"Yes," said a prim maiden of some seventeen summers, with a red sash, "and the dragon-fly cabs."

I kissed her on the brow and gave her an autograph copy of my latest volume.

Chapter V

I Lecture on Literature

MY lady friend suggested that perhaps I might care to say a few words on Literature. She was quite right : I did care. Having prefaced my remarks with a solo on the long wooden flute which it is my quaint practice to carry in my pocket, I said : Literature. (Applause.) The subject is vast but the followers are few. The literary profession, all the same, is the easiest in the world. Witness the success of Kipling, Barrie, and Black. As the Brindled-Haired One has remarked of Kipling :

“Vulgar, debased, impossible thy tale
That makes the shilling purchaser grow pale,
While Hindustani jargon soils the page,
And youth must emulate the faults of age.”

People often ask, Who reads Kipling? Why, for

instance, should he be a more popular writer than Barry Pain, or Jerome K. Jerome? The prodigal abundance of luridness is, I take it and assure you, the secret of Mr. Kipling's success. Passing on to Messrs. Barrie and Black, those eminent exponents of the bagpipe-playing tribes that dwell to the north of the Tweed, I find that the subject-matter of the two writers is similar, and that Barrie differentiates himself from Black by avoiding the phrase, "Heech, mon, whateffer," the meaning of which I do not know. Then Hardy. Hardy is on the down-grade. He writes tales with a moral nowadays. Never write tales with a moral. Rest assured the critics will find you out. Affect the wildly irresponsible and free. Consider Beerbohm. He toils not, neither does he spin moral yarns, yet the moralists in all their glory never had a press-cutting scrap-book so bulgy as his. But there are other writers. Kenneth Grahame, W. E. Henley, Dr. Robertson Nicoll, Ian Maclaren, S. R. Crockett, John Davidson, the Editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, Bernard Shaw, and myself. You know my works. They make them at the Bodley Head. Do I know Sappho! I should think so. She lives there now. What sings

J. M. B. in "the most flippant of all the illustrated weeklies!"—

"In Lesbos, of immortal fame,
The Poet struck her wondrous lyre,
And set the Isles of Greece aflame
And all the hearts of men afire.
But times, alas! have changed since then,
And Helicon is past our ken;
Parnassus is no poet's seat,
For Sappho sings in Vigo Street."

As to Grahame; he wrote a book about bairns which was too good to sell, and didn't.* And Crockett? Ye gods! Crockett writes books that are too bad to sell, and do. I hear that Edison is at present patenting a type-writing machine which will enable Samuel R. to write six 140,000-word novels simultaneously. The dear grey man! We now pass on to Mr. George Meredith, "vaunted through the land by all who praise what none can understand." Meredith is the well of English undefined. They used to read Meredith in this country. His downfall dates from

* This book is in a seventh edition.—*Publisher*.
And ought to be in a seventieth.—*R. de L.*

the first delivery of Conan Doyle's lecture about him——

A bell rang.

"The tennis-bell," explained the lady ; "the girls must go now."

They trooped out noisily, and I found myself alone with the lady of the Burne-Jones lips and the Phidian figure.

"You will come to my boudoir," said the lady.

I never refuse an invitation to a boudoir.

Chapter VI

How I Kissed the Lady Doctor when the
Moonbeams were on the Rhododendrons

IT was a trim boudoir—Sheraton, Sèvres, Crown Derby, Satsuma, and on the walls were a number of water-colours, which I identified as the work of Hokusai. This was charming.

“But I do not know your name,” said the lady.

“Call me M‘Aussin,” I murmured.

The lady paled, and a look of terror came into her dreamy eyes.

“I beg your pardon,” she replied faintly.

“M‘Aussin.”

“Oh, how you did frighten me! I thought you said—the Jeromanian atrocity at the Globe theatre, you know.” I knew. It had cost me many a sleepless night. I had written to Jerome about it, and been

requested, through the Answers to Correspondents column, to go out and fight for Greece and liberty like a man and a Byron instead of finding fault with one of the most euphonious, ancient and respectable clan-names of the Scottish nobility.

I drew nearer.

“You will come to the ball to-night?”

“Delighted,” I replied.

And I went to the ball.

Ah, the voluptuous, æsthetic languor of the ball! The beauty of the Golden Girls—all radiant, and all in white! A hidden orchestra of strings played dreamy waltzes—Strauss and Tosti; and borne in from the grounds was the rhythmic splash of the marble fountain in the rhododendron grove. It was good for me to be here.

My friend of the boudoir had a gown of cobalt blue, poetically *décolleté*, the skirt embroidered with silver tracery from designs by Wierdsley.

We waltzed.

.

Beside the fountain I took her hand in mine. A stream of yellow light from the ball-room caught her

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

on the left shoulder. The strawberry mark was not there.

"I said my name was M'Aussin," I remarked, while I slipped my left arm round the slimness of her waist. "I lied. I said I was the examiner. I lied. I am De Lyrienne on the Quest of the Gilt-edged Girl!"

"Oh, sir!"

And I kissed the lady doctor, as foretold in the advertisement, when the moonbeams were on the rhododendrons.

Chapter VII

I go a-Fishing

WAS I disappointed that there was no strawberry mark? Frankly, I was not. The discovery of the strawberry mark would have meant the end of my Quest; and few publishers will take a book of five thousand words. No; I was not downcast; I sang a song, extempore, as I made my way to the inn after the ball.

Having snuffed the candle with the silver snuffers, and lit my pipe (for even poets smoke in bed), I said to myself, "Courage, Matthias, courage" (though my name is not Matthias), and fell a-thynking, like Piscator in my edition of old Izaak's immortal volume. Little did the contemplative old man dream, as he sat in the osier-beds beside his beloved Dove, that his book would live to be edited by me. This posthumous

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

glory is a strange thing—erratic, unsatisfying, sad. I wonder if Izaak ever caught a fish in his life. I wonder, and I have my doubts. Though I edited the “Compleat Angler,” I never had a fishing-rod in my hand. Anybody, I am advised by the *Field*, can gather as much who reads the book in which I talk of a three-pound trout being flashed through the air at the end of several feet of gossamer gut. I fancy Don John Quixote Buchan of Oxford and the Moors inspired the *Field*. He is a prominent member of the Fish School of Literature, and would resent the superior romantic touch of a neophyte, as it were. Ah well, ah well! Good-night, good-night. . . .

.
“So here has been dawning
Another blue day;
Say shall we let it pass
Useless away?”

Carlyle wrote that. I used to think it was Watts. One never knows. Had Watts lived nowadays he would have been in great danger of the Laureateship. Eight o'clock. I open the lattice-window. The scent of lavender is in the air! Lavender! The old

I GO A-FISHING

house at Myrtle-cum-Redgates comes into my mind. It was there I first met Agnes. She was a lily of fifteen then, with a big straw hat and a lawn dress. Now, she is a member of Myrtle-cum-Redgates Parish Council, and appears in dirty law courts to show cause why the Empire should be shut up for ever. How time flies ! . . . I dress and go downstairs. Breakfast over, I summon mine host and borrow a fishing-rod. A brook with the usual De Lyrienne harpsichord accompaniment (patent applied for) passes the door, and it is my intention to fish. (Here I interpolate a thing I wrote in my school-days. Anything will do to fill up a book of this kind.)

THE COMPLEAT ANGLER.

How doth the angler, blithe and gay,
From morn to twilight hour,
Gather rheumatics all the day
From every passing shower.

How cheerfully upon the hook
He threads the wriggling bait :
The number of the fish he took
He multiplies by eight.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

What makes his comely face so bright?

Why does his basket clink?

Because, although he get no bite,

He's certain of a drink.

And though he be of manners mild,

This trait in him is odd:

He certainly won't spare the child

Who may have spoiled the rod.

His sense of etiquette is fine—

Politeness is his whim—

He always drops the fish a line

To come and dine with him.

Half a mile from the inn I put the rod together and affix a four-inch fly of many colours, which I find in the landlord's hook-book. I sit down in an osier-bed (all anglers of standing, I had gathered from Izaak, sit in an osier-bed—it seems to be the hall-mark of piscatorial respectability) and throw in. The fly of many colours sinks in the pool, which reflects the cerulean of the sky, and I fall asleep. . . . I dream that the point of the rod disappears, and that I am fast to a silver-sided salmon of considerable athletic potentiality. It leaps and dives, and dives and leaps, its

scales taking the sunshine and splitting it into dazzlingness. There are enterprise, energy and abandon in the eye of that salmon ; and I feel that I would know him again. A strange heat assails my brain. . . . I awake. My hat has fallen off, and the sun is beating direct on the locks that look so well in the illustrated papers. The rod lies undisturbed. A girl is passing. My usual luck. "Good-day," I remark. The girl takes no notice. "Good-day," I repeat. "I beg your pardon," she replies haughtily, "but I do not think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance."

She moves off.

I rise and follow.

"Madam," I say, "you do yourself an injustice—I am Richard De Lyrienne !"

Her aspect changes. Sweetness comes into her eyes.

"A thousand pardons, sir ; I did not know ; the Poet, of course, may speak to whom he chooses."

"And the eye of the Artist aids him in this instance," I reply gallantly, noting that she is comely.

"I am Nicolini : my sister Marie writes for the *Sun* You are evidently fishing."

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

I admit this.

"It is scarcely any good," she remarks sweetly ; "the dyeworks poison the stream, and there has not been a fish within twenty miles of this for fifteen years."

I must tell Buchan about that stream.

Chapter VIII

What Nicolini told me of the Star and Garter

NICOLINI was a wild rose—graceful, pliant, delicate. There was a pinkness about Nicolini that reminded me of the *Star*.

We walked along the river bank in the blaze of the midday sun till we came to a sheltered bower. "Let us sit," I said, and we sat, among the wild hyacinths, the wood-anemones and the jonquils.

"You have heard of me?" I asked.

"Your 'Religion of a Littery Gent' is my prayer-book," she replied, and I kissed her on the brow.

"You know my poetry?"

"Ah, London, London in the Spring,
You are, you know you are,
So full of amorous sights,
Especially by nights,"

she quoted, and I kissed her on the cheek, though I cursed that fellow Seaman.

"You have read 'Herrick'?" I asked, "or 'Heine'?"

"Neither," she said, and I kissed her on the lips. Here surely was a girl after my own heart.

That was a pleasant afternoon. We talked till the rays of the sun sent our shadows many feet behind, and the warm breath of the day changed to the cooler airs of early evening. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—seven on the ivy-clad church steeple. We arose and walked slowly up the bank of the stream, and while we walked Nicolini told me

"The Story of the Star and Garter."

.

"Most excellent, most excellent," I cried; "and do you know that I am in Quest of One with a strawberry mark on her left shoulder and £30,000 in the bank?"

"I have neither the one qualification nor the other," sighed Nicolini, "but I can offer you a heart of gold."

Hearts of gold are scarcely in my line, and I temporised.

"A heart of gold, my dear girl ! I am unworthy of it. To-morrow I resume the Quest."

"But not alone ?"

"Yes, alone."

"No ; I, Nicolini, go with you."

I kissed her on the lips. The excuse was valid.

"You are too kind," I remarked, at a loss for a more suitable remark. "Think of your parents or guardians."

"I have neither ; to-morrow I go out with you on your Quest. What more interesting for one young and inexperienced in the ways of the world than to accompany a real live poet on a real romantic Quest ?"

("What more embarrassing ?" I reflected.)

"Selina Morgan will be green with envy. And you'll show me how you write your poetry. I'll be ever so useful to you, for I'm an L.L.A. of St. Andrews, N.B. And, oh, won't we have a gay old time !"

("Worse and worse ! An L.L.A. of St. Andrews, N.B. Oh, the horror of having one's name in the papers along with that of a St. Andrews L.L.A. ! What would Culture say ?")

"My dear girl," I remarked, "the thing is impossible.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

There is no excuse for it. You admit that you have neither the strawberry mark nor the £30,000. My Quest will not wait. It must be over in time to write it up for the autumn publishing season. And then there is the American edition to be arranged for—that takes time."

I put my arm gently round her waist and kissed away the tears.

"Good-night, Nicolini."

"Good-night, Richard."

We parted at the cross-roads.

The girlish figure faded into the hawthorn perspective. I leant upon an old five-barred gate and thought. Was I a fool? Did £30,000 matter either this way or that? And the stays? I could pitch them into the mill-pond. Nicolini was very fair to look upon, and we could keep the St. Andrews L.L.A. a secret. Nobody would know about it in Kootenay. Yes, we would go to Kootenay. The corn there is fifteen feet high. Fifteen feet—that's a Locksley Hall line. Ye gods, two stalks would make a verse. . . . What whistle was that? The nightingale's? Perhaps. I do not know. I have no means of knowing. The only nightingale I

ever heard was Florence, and that was at a Red Cross meeting in St. James's Hall. . . . Could Zangwill beat that? Not extempore. Could his brother? I have my doubts. I think often in this style—irresponsible, fantastic, free. Do you, dear reader? To me it means so many golden guineas. As I think, I take shorthand notes of the thoughts and send them to the magazines, which are only too glad to get them. In company, or in my rooms, when I say a good thing I take the first opportunity of making a surreptitious note of it on my cuffs—which explains the voluminousness of my wrist linen, as commented on by Burgler in the *Windsor*. You know Burgler? He is doing well, is Burgler. He goes around and finds out what kind of gold pen George Egerton and the Pioneer Club Brigade use, and then makes his notes into an article. Oh, a wily man is Burgler! It was he who gave the public the thrilling item of the flannel-backed waistcoat. Never heard of the flannel-backed waistcoat of De Lyrienne? Not to have heard of that is, &c. Half the coughs and colds of this country are due to the calico strip which forms the back of the ordinary waistcoat. I advocated the general adoption of the flannel-back. A newspaper humorist called

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

me a "flannel-backed duck." If ever I stand for Parliament my election cry will be, "De Lyrienne and the Flannel-backed Waistcoat." How much nicer, how much more euphonious, how much more intelligible, than the vulgar, commonplace, ungrammatical newspaper, "Jones and the Nationalisation of Land Values and the Control of the Implements of Production and Distribution by the People." When I think of the politician's lack of originality I weep for England. I say "England" advisedly. They tell me that the Canny Scot wants it called Britain. I smile. Poets know better. Eh, W. E. H. ?

"What have I done for you,
England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
England, my own?"

Ah well ; to bed, to bed.

.

The landlord met me at the porch. I returned him the fishing-rod with thanks, and remarked that I was afraid it would take a good deal of rod sparing to spoil that river. Then I passed into the parlour, reflecting

how I could knock that epigram into shape for publication, for I saw that there was something in it.

As I smoked my pipe in the honeysuckle-covered summer-house, the air charged with the sweet odour of the blossoms, I remembered the determined look in Nicolini's eye as she imparted her intention of accompanying me next day. What if she lay in wait for me in the morning?

I entered the house.

"Landlord," I cried; "call me at five o'clock to-morrow—breakfast at half-past. Indian tea and a rasher of bacon."

"Anything else, sir?"

"Nothing else. By the way, landlord," I remarked, in accordance with my reputation as a wit, "what is more rash than a rasher of bacon?"

"Two rashers," he replied, and with this interchange of pleasantries we said good-night.

Little did I dream what the morrow had in store as I lay in bed, the moonbeams playing on the white coverlet marked "The Swan Inn, No. 12."

Chapter IX

Why Nicolini Came

HAVING paid the reckoning, I departed by the back door. I had not gone twenty yards when before me stood Nicolini, radiant in the summer morning.

"Good-day," she hailed me in a voice sweet as the call of the campanero.

"Good-morning," I returned, and would have passed on.

"Oh, Dick," she pleaded, "you won't leave me?"

"My dear girl," I said, "I told you yesterday that I am on the hunt for the Thirty Thousand Pounder, and that mere girls, however good and however beautiful, do not mark the close of the Quest."

She took my arm. She looked into my eyes. . . .

WHY NICOLINI CAME

I am a poet. I said she might come with me. And together we went.

As we walked she told me the story of her first engagement.

NICOLINI'S STORY.

(Told to an andante accompaniment of singing birds and humming bees.—June 189—.)

George was the eldest son of the parvenu who bought the Hall. I was the vicar's daughter, and when quite a tiny dot—I am sixteen now—I was engaged to George, my senior by three years. They sent George to a college of some kind or other in London, in order to obtain the polish that he sadly lacked. When George left the village he had never heard of Maupassant, or Ibsen (my darling !), or Loti, or Maeterlinck—which made me sad. We corresponded. Letter by letter I noted an improvement in George's style. He dropped the "in connection with," became less fond of "reliable," dispensed with the vulgar hieroglyphics that puzzle the learned Judges in breach-of-promise cases, stopped sending me yellow-backs, and went in for Henry James. This, I

thought, was excellent. George was entering into the full possession of his intellectual kingdom. When he came down at Christmas I noticed, with keen satisfaction, that he wore an Art necktie, and that the length of his hair was no longer suggestive of Peterhead and the prize-ring. All, I said to myself, is well. Then, at his request, I went to see him in London. He met me at the station, and we passed the afternoon in the Park. The burgeoning almond-trees moved him to quote Wordsworth, and he told me he had written a triolet; he would send it to me at home. He suggested dinner, and we adjourned to Frascati's. The claret did it. George drank it from a champagne glass! . . . The engagement was broken off next day. I have never seen him since. I think he went abroad to cut down trees and play the banjo in the backwoods in the good old three-volume novel style. And that is the story of my first engagement.

I kissed Nicolini, and we proceeded in silence for some yards.

"Tell me the story of your life, now," she suggested.

WHY NICOLINI CAME

In an instant the whole plot flashed upon me ; but I was calm.

“ For your sister to publish in the *Sun*, double-leaded, and with scare headings ! ”

Nicolini sprang back. I could see from her eyes that I had struck truth, and solved the whole puzzle of her anxiety to come with me and talk with me.

“ Wretch ! ” she cried, and left me.

Chapter X

The Crowning of Verbert

I TRUDGED on, ruminating upon the fickleness of femininity, till I reached a tavern with the sign, The White Cockade.

A young man with a kilt stood in the doorway. His companion, also a young man, resembled him in appearance.

"Ah, Stuart; ah, Stuart," I heard him say, "the good old *Whirlwind* days are past. I am getting quite respectable. They take me in the *Saturday Review* now."

I recognised the voice. Verbert Hivian by all that's aristocratic!

"Hast thou never heard of Verbert—
Verbert in his Stuart kilt—
And his paper ca'ed the *Whirlwind*
Wi' his pictur' aye intilt?"

(Did anybody say that that Burns kind of stuff was difficult to do ?)

I drew my Homburg hat over my eyes, fearing recognition, turned from the house, and walked smartly away, only to turn at the cross-roads and approach it again by a circuitous route.

The young men had disappeared. I entered cautiously. I rang for the landlord.

"Landlord," I said, "these young men, are they—are they safe ?"

"Quite safe," he replied reassuringly ; "but don't say Guelph."

I assured him I would observe the precaution, and added, "Can you oblige me with a false beard ?"

"Certainly, sir ;" and he whistled up the tube, "False beard, one ; in a hurry, please."

"I will dine with the young men," I informed him.

"Right you are, sir."

The beard arrived and I hooked it on. It was a Svengali beard that the landlord had worn at the Hunt fancy dress ball. It was a curious ensemble—the De Lyrienne locks (as photoed in the *Strand*) and the deep black beard. I smiled.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Hivian and Wherskine (Stuart) were seated when I reached the dining-room.

A fourth diner was seemingly expected, for there were two vacant chairs. I appropriated one.

"Nice day for the Cause, gentlemen," I observed.

"What cause?" said Verbert, feigning ignorance.

"You expect another diner?" I continued.

"The chair is for the King," responded Verbert haughtily.

"Have some soup—Cockade-a-leekie."

It was time for me to indicate that I was one of them, as it were, so I passed the Jacobite signal.

Verbert and Wherskine rose to their feet, and so did I, and in silence we drank to the king over the water and the dead *Whirlwind*.

"You are a stranger in these parts?" queried Wherskine.

"I am."

"You belong to the Order of the Fountain Pen, I observe."

I hastily buttoned my coat and tried to look innocent.

"You write?" I ventured to Hivian.

THE CROWNING OF VERBERT

"A little."

"Doing much just now?"

"Not much : a three-volume novel and a History of Europe, both founded on fact."

I laughed heartily, and had some more soup.

"To-night," added Wherskine mysteriously, "we crown Verbert King of the Jacobites."

"Ah !" I said.

It was a gay ceremony, accompanied by six magnums of Pol Roger. "Now," quoth Verbert, after the sixth magnum, "for the fireworks."

Fireworks ! I like fireworks. We clambered on to the roof, none daring to make us afraid ; and the festive squib and the yellow Roman candle flashed to the country air. Then we had crackers, and rockets, and golden rain, and silver rain that would have charmed the poetic soul of my young friend Olive Custance ; and more squibs and more Roman candles. Then we had the rural constable.

Though ponderous as his wit, of which we had several samples, the rural constable clambered on to the roof and took the three of us in charge.

"I arrest you in the name of the Queen."

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

"The Queen!" scoffed Verbert. "What Queen?"

The rural constable took no notice, but advised us that we had committed a contravention of 99 Vict. cap. 31*a* by discharging squibs and other explosives from a roof within the meaning of the Act.

"And here's a man with a false beard," said he triumphantly.

"A false beard!" chimed in Verbert and Wherskine in amazement; "you lie."

It was just then that I discovered a convenient trap down which I slid into a garret, hence to the staircase and out into the night.

.

I read in the country paper that Verbert and Wherskine had each been fined in two shillings-and-sixpence with the option of three days' imprisonment.

Chapter XI

The Kind of Thing that Happens in the Sunday Papers

I AM not feeling well this morning. The cooking at those rustic hostelries is slowly sapping my system. Last night the fried sole was most scandalously scorched, and the cellar had nothing better to offer than Spanish port of the year before last. . . . I paid my bill, kissed the chambermaid and left the inn. A hot sun hung high in the heavens ; the hedges nodded heavily beneath a three weeks' coating of dust ; the white glare of the baking roads blinded me.

I counted my money . . . three pounds. By my lyre, but 'tis time I tracked the elusive Gilt-edged Girl. But, courage, Richard ; courage.

“ Lives of great explorers teach us
We can make our Quests sublime ;

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Fame and fortune both will reach us
If we only bide our time.

Quests are real, Quests are manly,
If they're engineered aright—
Look at Fridtjof, look at Stanley,
With their hundred pounds a-night!"

I had just finished these lines when the air was suddenly filled with a musical tinkling. I looked behind, and lo! through a cloud of dust loomed the figure of an approaching cyclist. A girl, for a ducat! At first sight her attire deceived me, but there was no mistaking the short dark curls falling upon her marble brow.

I gave her greeting, and she dismounted and chatted cheerfully. I was disappointed to find that she was unmarried, for one flirtation with a wife is worth two with a maid. And a flirtation with a widow is worth half-a-dozen with either. A something told me this was not the Gilt-edged Girl.

Marsilia (she told me to call her Marsilia) and I grew very friendly, and I pushed her cycle along. As night was falling, we saw lights twinkling through the

dusk and discovered ourselves in a tiny hamlet, with a tiny inn containing a very few tiny rooms. There was only one room vacant. Now, before reaching the inn, we had decided to pass as brothers, and the announcement of the landlord placed us in a quandary.

Marsilia blushed.

"We should like two rooms," I said. "I talk in my sleep a good deal, and it disturbs my brother ; but——"

"It can't be helped, Richard," said Marsilia, putting her hands in her pockets, as I had taught her.

The dinner was divine—for the country—and over our coffee and cigarettes Marsilia melted into sweet confidences and told me a story. . . . I laughed heartily and vowed to Marsilia 'twas the freshest, most piquant tale I had heard since that night at Ostend when Grant Allen, Max and I met the Man from Constantinople.

I kissed Marsilia.

"Good-night, dear," I whispered ; "I shall be up in five minutes. That will give you time, eh ?"

I had a final cigarette and curaçao in the moonlight. Then I stole up the narrow stairs and gently opened the door of the room.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Marsilia had left the lamp burning, and on a chair I descried a heap of feminine things—white, dainty, frilled—for all the world like the advertisement pages of the *Lady's Pictorial*.

“Marsil——”

I was interrupted by a voice behind me.

“Begging your pardon, sir ; but I am glad to say, sir, you may have a room to yourself now. The gentleman as whom it was kept for has wired to say that he can't come till to-morrow.”

It was the landlord.

I shut the door of Marsilia's double-bedded room with a bang and, following the landlord, retired to the other chamber. My dreams were of golden argosies sailing on sapphire seas.

When I awoke in the morning the landlord handed me a letter.

“Your brother has gone off,” he said ; “he left you this, and said you would understand.”

I opened it with feverish haste. It contained only one word—“Good-bye.”

Good-bye, Marsilia, good-bye. You left me with a sad heart and a bill for twenty-five shillings to pay, and

KIND OF THING THAT HAPPENS IN THE SUNDAY PAPERS

I have not forgotten. Only two pounds left, De Lyrienne, and the Gilt-edged Girl still flits before you in the tantalising misty future ! Something must be done.

Chapter XII

The False Syllogism

HAVING planned myself out for a poet, I never did much at Logic at the University. It was this that caused the trouble.

I arrived in London—for the Quest had taken me back to town—feeling tired of the expedition altogether. They introduced me to the girl, and said she came from Manchester.

Manchester, I reflected. All barmaids come from Manchester : Agnes comes from Manchester ; Agnes is a barmaid.

With this belief confidently established I sailed into conversation.

We were seated in a park, a charming park, but lacking botanical variety. Rhododendrons do pall upon one. Below, a military band was playing the eternal "Intermezzo."

"This," I said, "is sad."

"Sad?—why sad?" responded Agnes.

"Sad," I said, "in that it is part of the *répertoire* of the *hoi polloi*, and what is good enough for the *hoi polloi* is scarcely good enough for us."

I saw that she did not understand.

"Cheer up, my dear," I said; "night falls, and night is an invention of heaven. I should fancy it is written in red ink in the celestial patent lists. Let us to the Empire."

We found the Empire good. Really, I prefer the crashing crescendo of the music-hall chorus to the laboured contrapuntal efforts of Handel and the rest of them—though, of course, this must not get abroad. The poet must preserve the atmosphere of mystery and remoteness; each injudicious paragraph in the personal columns of the evening papers is a nail in the coffin of his popularity. See how they ruined Tennyson by telling Demos what kind of pipe he smoked; and mark the collapse of Browning after the public got to know that he wore two flannel shirts in winter and was most particular about the hot-water bottle in his bed all the year round.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

In her rooms, after the show, Agnes and I had coffee—black as the devil and sweet as sin.

We talked. Agnes, it appeared, was married, but her husband was a newspaper man, and came home only on Sundays. Thus we were quite safe, this being Tuesday.

“You are very beautiful,” I remarked, having a big belief in the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

“Flatterer !” returned Agnes commonplacely. I had looked for an epigram that would have done for the book.

“Your figure,” I continued, “has the grace of a drawing by Will Rothenstein (a friend of mine : the ad. will do no harm) and the charm of a Whistlerian nocturne in silver and grey.”

She blushed, seemingly being familiar with some other Whistlerian nocturne—“The Bath,” perhaps.

She nestled close to me.

“You love me,” I said passionately.

“I do.”

“And——”

Chapter XIII

A^H !

Chapter XIV

A Sexagesimal Symposium

I MET Allen Grant in Piccadilly to-day. Dear Allen : I have done my best for Allen, but somehow he has not soared as I expected. I was very hopeful about him when he put out the "Woman Who Did," although I strongly commented (in private) upon his careless inattention to detail. No one knows better than Allen himself that I would gladly have lent him the catalogue from which I glean these realistic descriptions of *lingerie*. And Literature without *Lingerie* is, now that I have educated the public taste, considered as unsatisfying and as unsatisfactory as a woman without wit. But I digress.

"I was thinking," said Allen, "that the Advance Guard of Nineteenth Century Literature should do something by way of celebrating Her Majesty's Jubilee. It will be a good ad."

"Let's stand ourselves a dinner," I suggested, "and invite the girls in."

"Ah, Dick ; ah, Dick," he said playfully, "ever after the petticoats. What a blade you are, my boy !"

The dinner, in the Hôtel Métropole, was attended by a brilliant detachment of the Young Brigade and a few lady friends. I took the chair myself. Amongst those present were : Allen Grant, Rudyard Kipling, Aubrey Beardsley, Roy Devereux, Marriott Watson, Kenneth Grahame, J. M. Barrie, Marie Lloyd, Arthur Symons, Max Beerbohm, T. P. O'Connor, Charles Robinson, Henry Harland, A. P. Watt, John Lane, John Buchan, John Davidson, the Rev. H. R. Haweis, Ella D'Arcy, Neil Munro, Evelyn Sharp, Jimmy Sickert, Walter Pennell, Joseph Whistler, Frank Harris, Annie S. Levenson, Ada Swan, and Arthur Roberts.

We had numerous letters of apology.

Mr. Stead wrote : "Sorry I can't attend. I am busy with *The Mystery of the History*."

Ian Maclaren wrote : "Heech, mon, I doot it widna be the thing for a man o' the claith like mysel' tae colloque with playactress buddies ava."

Herbert Vivian : "By the White Cockade, and d'ye

think I'd toast the house of Brunswick? Never! So long as Stuart blood runs in my veins and the papers keep on taking my stuff, I'll never attend such an orgie."

The "cold interposition of the sea" was the excuse put forward by G. W. Cable, W. D. Howells, T. B. Aldrich, Stephen Crane, E. C. Stedman, R. Harding Davis, James L. Ford, Hamlin Garland, Louise Chandler Moulton, Jeannette Gilder, Richard Watson Gilder, Robert Bridges, F. J. Stimson, Henry B. Fuller, Robert W. Chambers, and C. G. D. Roberts.

Ibsen cabled: "Apologies for absence. The Literary Heart of Scandinavia goes out to the new Brigade."

(A Voice: "Fancy that, Hedda!" and laughter.)

Mr. William Black, dating from Stronachlachur-antanvohr, N.B., wrote: "Though scarcely a New Brigade man myself, I should have been much pleased to accept your invitation, but am at present salmon-fishing in the North. Last night I saw a fine sunset. The sky was copper-red above Oban, where the yellow fleece of the sun-tinged cumuli took the——"

It was agreed to hold the rest of the letter as read.

We succeeded very well without these gentlemen. I proposed the Queen.

After dinner, Kipling suggested that he would show the company how he would have written my well-known poem, "A Ballad of London."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Kipling, adjusting his spectacles, "De Lyrienne is a very good man, but here is how I would have treated London :

"It's London, London, London, you're the Devil's own delight—
A smilin', swiggin', sinful sort of place ;
Gawd 'elp 'im from the country who goes through your 'eart by
night,
And 'unts about to find a pretty face.

"They calls your bloomin' lampposts 'iron lilies,' oh my eyes!
W'y don't they call 'em rhubarb and ha' done?
An' hansoms, full o' balmy blokes, they say is 'dragon flies'—
Which, I suppose, is just the poet's fun.

It's London, you're a daisy, and it's London, you're a dear,
I likes your woooin', winnin' sort o' way ;
But when it comes to wimmen, w'y of course it's very clear
You aren't arf a patch on Mandalay."

I rose to my feet. I was not prepared to admit the superiority of the Mandalay girl, for I knew that the Gilt-edged one was as English as the *Times* and the morning tub.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

"Rudyard, ladies and gentlemen," I said, "Kipling is a very good man, but here is how I would have written about Mandalay," and I recited :

"Ah, Mandalay,
I never can forget ;
Across the bay
I see thee gleaming yet.
And Supi-yaw-let—
Wasn't that her name?—
I met her at the temple"—

J. M. Barrie (hilariously) :

"When the kye cam hame."

"Mr. Barrie," I said, "I have the greatest possible respect for your genius, but, dagont, I won't stand your interruptions. Besides, you are not a poet."

"A' richt, lad," said Barrie, taking a snuff, and adjusting his muffler ; "paurdon me mcddlin', but I thocht it rhymed gey weel."

Then I continued :

"Her petticoat
Was the daintiest, tenderest thing,
All frills . . .
And the swing

A SEXAGESIMAL SYMPOSIUM

Of her skirts disclosed
To my dazzled eyes
Angelic ankles—
Feet of the smallest size.

Now I am here—
Here again in Pall Mall,
Lonely and far away—
Far from the temple bell.
But, ah, I am quite content,
For along the Strand
There are maidens quite as sweet as in
The 'cleaner, greener land.'

I sat down and called on Barrie to oblige. He was busy talking to one of the Celtic Gloom men, Neil Munro, who was insisting that a pibroch is not a bagpipe.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Barrie, "I'll jist gie ye a swatch o' ma freen' John Davidson's poem about that nun lassie."

And he began :

"Abune a brae the convent hung,
Oot ower a burnie lookin' doon ;
Whaur mony a mighty mountain flung
Its shadows ower baith tower and toon.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Within its wa's a lassie dwelt,
And oh, but she was wae, puir thing,
Until one day she really felt
She maun be oot and hae a fling.

'I carena though they don't aloo
Me oot,' says she, 'tae tell the truth ;
I'm sister tae the North Pole noo
And second cousin tae the Sooth '"—

Somebody pulled Barrie's coat-tail at this stage and he sat down.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said, "the hour grows late ; we have only time for a few more turns, and I have much pleasure in calling upon my friend Marie Lloyd to favour the company with a song.

Marie sang, and the company separated immediately afterwards.

Not much in this chapter about the Gilt-edged Girl, you say ? You are right. But read on.

Chapter XV

I Have a Clue

AS I lay in bed next night I dreamed a dream. I dreamed that a newspaper sub-editor had information of value to me in the Quest. He was a tall man with blue spectacles and a weary look, and his scissors nictated with the rapidity of the chameleon's eyelid. He said: "Go north, young man, go north. Try Thrums."

.

I had recognised the newspaper office in the dream by the evening's contents bill which hung on the back of the door leading from the sub-editor's file-laden chamber to the leader-writers' room.

The bill said :

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

A DUCAL DODGE



A TORY TRICK ;

and the type was half a foot high.

So I called next day. In the sub-editors' room I found the sub-editor exactly as I had dreamed.

"Good afternoon," I hailed him.

"Afternoon," he replied, and added to an assistant, "Cut the County Council and put ten headlines on the defeat of the Government."

"I have called," I said, "to see you on a curious matter."

He gave me four minutes, and as he filled a dirty clay pipe with black tobacco, which he cut with the blade of his scissors, I told him the tale of my dream.

He started when I came to the word "Thrums."

"Come outside," he said ; and we went outside.

I had never visited the "Cheese" before, but I knew it at once from the illustrated articles in the magazines. I remembered they even put photographs of it opposite a signed poem of mine.

"How is the information of value to you?" he asked.

"I am on a Quest," I explained ; "the Quest of the Gilt-edged Girl, and when it is over I am to write a book about it."

"Ah !"

"You can help me ?"

"The advice I gave you in the dream," he returned, "is correct. See the man who lives in the solitary white-washed cottage on the Taranty Moor."

"I thank you. Have another ?"

"Not just now," he said, and was gone.

.

They are not to be trusted, these newspaper people. That evening his paper had these lines under the heading "Mainly Wrong About People" : "Richard De Lyrienne, the poet, who has been heard of comparatively little of late, is at present engaged in an interesting occupation. He called here to-day and told us all about it. He is seeking the Gilt-edged Girl, and, in his own words, when it is over he will write a book about it. He has obtained a trustworthy clue—which suggests that Richard would not have shone as a Scotland Yard detective—and to-night he goes North.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

Mr. De Lyrienne is in excellent health, and the search, he assured us, afforded him every enjoyment. The cloth cap which he used to affect has been discarded for a Homburg hat ; but he still wears the flowing De Lyrienne tie."

Well, well, what did it matter ? I had got a clue. That, after all, was the main thing.

Chapter XVI

The Clue

I BOUGHT some sgean-dubhs, and took the night-mail for Caledonia.

Next morning I found myself in a place called Dundee, where the natives eke out a precarious existence by boiling marmalade and hunting whales. I left early. There are no Gilt-edged Girls in Dundee.

“An obsolete humorist called Ward” likens a Colorado train to a string of second-hand coffins, but the trip from Dundee to Thrums convinced me that they have trains of that kind not so far off as Colorado. My object in visiting Thrums was twofold : I had to find the man with the information as to the Gilt-edged Girl ; and I wanted to see Barrie on a most important point.

It was inspiring here. The shop windows—great,

big, flaring, modern windows with insured plate-glass—displayed Barrie biscuits, Barrie rock, Barrie cough-drops, Barrie umbrellas, Barrie beef, Barrie ginger-beer, Barrie overcoats, Barrie boots, Barrie potatoes (Barrium magnums), Barrie collars, Barrie neckties, Barrie tooth-quills, Barrie walking-sticks, Barrie notepaper (with a portrait of the gentleman in three colours on every page), Barrie fishing-reels, Barrie candles, Barrie washing powder, Barrie penknives, Barrie jujubes, Barrie braces, and Barrie buns. I reflected that I had been less fortunate than this. They don't have De Lyrienne soap yet, that I know of. These tributes of the people to Literature were most gratifying. I wrote to Carrie Morelli about it, and she wired in reply : "The great heart of the Vulgar is all right yet.—CARRIE."

I called on Barrie and was informed that he had gone to the fishing, but would be back to tea ; so I strolled around, culling golden petals from the Whinny Knowes, and remarking, "Heech, mon," to Mr. T. Haggart, who did not seem to understand (the laugh would come next day, likely), I cut some lines on the Window with a diamond after the fashion of Mr. Burns.

THE CLUE

Then I hunted up the man with the clue to the Gilt-edged Girl and the £30,000.

He was a "solitary man, ranging apart." I found him in the white-washed cottage on the Taranty Moor. There was an air of mystery about him.

"Sit down, please," he said as we entered the kitchen, and then he absent-mindedly spoke to himself. "They're reading me in America now. And they think Fiona Mackay's a woman! Great joke. And a Celtic woman at that."

"I beg pardon," he added to me; "I quite forgot. I think you said you came for the Police Tax. You'll find it beside that Gaelic dictionary, below that bowl—see?—8s. 6½d., and dear at the price;" and he broke off into the refrain of a music-hall song that was popular in the early sixties.

I explained matters, and told him the object of my visit.

"Ah," he reflected, "the Gilt-edged Girl. Yes. The secret is no good to me—I will never go to London any more, any more. Gone the good old Press Club days, gone the good old Cheshire Cheese. It wouldn't do: a Fleet Street liner working the Celtic Gloom would scarcely catch on."

I followed him, but feigned ignorance.

"You were saying?"

"I was saying," he continued, "the secret couldn't do me much good now. You know Thayer Street?"

"Yes; out Marble Arch way."

"Well, Quillman, an old critic friend of mine, has the document. How he got it I cannot tell you. It is a mystery as profound as that of the Green Triangles in my latest, 'Blue Fire.' Quillman—you don't know Quillman? He was a good sort. Those nights, those nights! It was a good life, no doubt, but it didn't pay so well as the Gloom. Quillman stays in Thayer Street. Call on him; he will do the rest."

I thanked him, and as I said good-bye I asked him if he ever saw Barrie.

"Haven't seen him since I left Fleet Street."

"But he lives here."

"Lives *here*!" He spoke anxiously. "Lives where?"

"Thrums."

"But this is Kirriemuir," and he laughed.

"Kirriemuir is Thrums," I whispered.

"I shouldn't have thought it," he replied.

THE CLUE

I subsequently learned that he left next day, and is now writing from an attic in Edinburgh.

I found Barrie at home when I called again. I sent in my card, and James, smoking a clay and wearing the relics of a pair of slippers, appeared in the doorway. In his left hand he held a copy of the *British Weekly*, which he nervously endeavoured to shove into his trouser pocket.

"De Lyrienne, I jalouse, frae the picters in the windies," he hailed me.

"Barrie, I suppose," I remarked.

We shook hands. The Thrums cinematographer's views of the scene are now being shown all over America, from Maine to San Francisco, from Behring Straits to Panama.

"Hoots lad," he said, "I'm rale gled to see ye. You're lookin' weel. Aiblins ye'll hae a cogie o' tea wi' the wife an' me?"

I stepped inside and was cordially greeted by Mrs. Barrie. I recognised Claudius Clear's portrait above the fireplace, and I noticed a snapshot of my host in Highland costume as he appeared at the Blairgowrie games in the summer of 189-. After tea, Mrs. Barrie

having left the room, I observed to Mr. Barrie that I should like to have a few words with him in private on important business.

"Richt, lad," he rejoined, filling up his old briar with the immortal mixture, and passing me the tin. "We'll tak' a bit stroll."

It was a fine July evening.

"I will talk as man to man," I began.

"Richt," said he.

"It is no detail that has brought me from London—— Ah, London ; London, my——"

"Ay, I ken," he interpolated, somewhat unfeelingly, I thought.

"I want you to give me a pledge, a solemn pledge. You will promise me?"

"May be," he replied cautiously.

"I ask you by all that's 'copy' never to use 'dagont' any more."

He started, his pipe fell to the ground, he shook my hand with a nervous grip, and as he looked up into my eyes he said, in a quavering voice :

"I canna, man, I canna ; I've tae mak' ma livin'. 'Tak' awa' onything ye like, but dinna tak' awa' dagont."

THE CLUE

“Your decision is irrevocable? You decline to do this, even in honour of the Record Reign?”

“Ay.”

A tear rose in his eye.

“Farewell,” I said; “a long farewell. Henceforth we are strangers.”

And I strode off into the night.

.

I had done my best. It was a noble mission, and I had failed. Perhaps he was right after all. How should I get along without the iron lilies?

Chapter XVII

After Quillman

RETURNED to London, I sought Quillman at once. I called at his rooms in Thayer Street and rang the bell. An elderly lady, demure and Quaker-like, opened the door.

"Is Mr. Quillman in?" I inquired, my voice somewhat shaky through excitement.

"Mr. Quillman," said the lady, "is on holiday; he has gone to——"

At this moment a fair vision floated across the lobby—a girl. Her face had the demureness of a Bret Harte school-ma'am, and a sweetness and repose that charmed me. In a moment she had gone—disappeared into a room.

"I beg pardon," I said abstractedly, for the sight did not easily fade from the retina.

AFTER QUILLMAN

“Mr. Quillman,” repeated the elderly person, “is on holiday ; he has gone to the Isle of Man—to Douglas.”

“His address ?”

“I do not know.”

I thanked her and departed, my mind full of the girl I had seen. A diamond in a coal-scuttle ; a camellia in a waste of weeds ; an Ethel Reed poster in half an acre of Belfast litho conventions ; a silver salmon in a shoal of blear-eyed cod.

Quillman must be found.

Chapter XVIII

The Home of Al

IT was August—giddy, golden August: month of the Summer Girl; month of the burning yellow sands, the lazily swinging sea, the twinkling lights on the promenade as dusk falls and the wind comes in chill from the sea, while the strings of the band on the pier sigh and swoon in the ecstasies of the latest waltz. I had a vision of glorious girls in white filmy blouses drinking, beneath the yellow moon, between the dances. I hailed with delight the prospect of a journey to the Isle of Man. My friend Al Kane was there too; and, judging from his writings, he has devoted himself assiduously to the study of girls, both Gilt-edged and Morocco Bound.

Al met me on Douglas Pier. I was rather

disappointed with Douglas ; it seemed tawdry and tedious.

"It's all right, old man," Al reassured me as we sipped our maraschino ; "this is Bank Holiday, you know, and Demos is on the town. There are some nice bits in the interior where I get my copy from." Al Kane smiled and sighed. "Ah me, Richard, I am sorry to say we have fallen on evil days in dear old Manxland. The girls change their names as often as their complexions. But, when in doubt, you are always safe to address them as 'Dear.'"

I bought two cheroots.

"Al," I said, "I am a gay dog, a blade, a gallant. I am looking for a girl with a strawberry mark."

Al whipped a note-book from his pocket, and scrawled a line in it.

"Now look here, Al," I remonstrated, "you are not to work that into your next book. I insist upon the copyright of that strawberry mark."

Al's lip curled contemptuously. "What a weird imagination you have, Dick !" he said. "I wasn't thinking about it. It just occurred to me that Solomon and the Queen of Sheba would make good

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

characters for my next story. I shall make Solomon an M.P. and the Queen of Sheba a Society journalist. You know the animal?"

"I have seen specimens in London."

"Ah, London, London, my delight," murmured Al. "Fine poem that, Richard. It inspired me to write another, do you know? It runs :

" 'Ah, Douglas, Douglas, my delight ;
Your Brighton and your Isle of Wight,
For ozoned air and girls with wit
Are certainly quite out of it.' "

How's that? I wrote that for the Guide Book. Seems easy enough to do that sort of thing."

I asked Al to show me some of the fine old Manx customs. "Try and arrange something picturesque," I said ; "it would always help to fill up the book. How about the installation of a Deemster or two, with bands, fishermen in costume, slow music and limelight effects?"

And Al Kane answered and said: "The inauguration of the electric light on the new Parade takes place this afternoon. I have two tickets for the luncheon."

And this is Manxland ! This is the atmosphere that T. P. extolled on the front page of the *Weekly Sun* ! You know how T. P. does the front page ? Some day I shall tell you, but not now. . . .

Al Kane and I walked to the new Parade. I suggested a four-wheeler, but Al said he could not afford to risk his reputation for unconventionality by taking so vulgar a vehicle, and there were no hansoms on the stand.

As we passed the Balmoral, a little man with a large moustache leered at us and smiled contemptuously.

Al blushed.

"Who is he ?" I asked. "I understood you were a little tin god here, Al."

"Oh, he is only a barber," said Al deprecatingly ; "and, you see, I don't patronise his profession very often. Neither do you, Richard ; and the man resents your presence here."

I turned to gaze out over the splendid sweep of shimmering sea that lay between the island and the lowering Lancashire coast, and mused upon the base passions that blind the souls of men and barbers.

Then I heard Al give a gurgle of delight—the gurgle with which an angler greets his first salmon, or a Bayswater young man his first scented envelope from a Gaiety chorus-girl.

I turned and beheld a *spirituelle* little lady in a blue gown and a white straw hat at our side.

It was Carrie Morelli !

I gave her the grip fraternal. It is my very own invention ; I tried it first on Beardsley, and he fell on my neck and asked me to dine with him at the Savoy. Poor Beardsley ! They tell me he is sadly degenerating. He drew a pretty girl last week.

“Well, Carrie,” I remarked, “and what are you doing in Manxland ?”

“Hush !” she whispered, looking around ; “I am looking for a critic. I traced him from London to Manchester (‘Quillman,’ I reflected, ‘by all that’s lucky !’), and then to a boarding-house here. He is out just now—drinking porter in some low public-house, likely. I am going to kill him.”

“Why ?” asked Al and I simultaneously.

“Because he took no notice of the letter that I wrote to the *Academy*, about his review of ‘Sizka.’”

“Poor dear!” said I sympathetically ; “what a brute the man must be !”

“Will you help me, Richard?” said Carrie pleadingly. “I’ll do as much for you. And I’ll ask the Gilt-edged Girl to tea when you’ve found her.”

“I—er—really must go to the inauguration of the electric light at the new Parade,” said Al Kane. “I’ll leave you to attend to the case of the critic. Do it as quietly as possible, and try and bury the body. A scandal would scare away the summer visitors. We generally do our murders here in the winter.”

We parted at the cross-roads.

Chapter XIX

How We Killed the Critic

THE slanting sunshine was casting long shadows across the island as Carrie and I climbed the steep cliffs that rise above the town. We were on the track of the critic. Late in the afternoon we saw him leave his boarding-house and walk towards the cliff. I looked at Carrie; Carrie looked at me. Our hands met in the Grip, and I said a few cheering words to Carrie. I must confess that my heart reproached me somewhat for the task I had undertaken. I am a critic myself. This man, who walked in the sunset-glow all unwitting of the fate in store for him, was a critic also. Further, he was, I felt almost sure, the Man with the Clue. But I had given my word to Carrie.

The critic stood at the top of the cliff, his figure

HOW WE KILLED THE CRITIC

silhouetted against the golden sky, and lit his pipe. Cautiously we crawled towards him ; but no, no—I cannot, I cannot. Carrie shall finish this chapter ; killing is no theme for the pen of De Lyrienne. Besides, Carrie wrote the “Murder of Felicia.”

(Completed by Carrie Morelli.)

The critic lit his pipe, and which * I observed to be of clay. Clay, common clay, seems to me the most fitting material for a critic to indulge his bestial recreation in. He left his kennel with a light heart, likely. Perhaps he has a wife and children. I suppose critics do have wives and children sometimes. Richard and I drew nearer. The sunset flamed in a spangled splendour of red, gold, blue, green, ultramarine, yellow ochre, and Chinese white. Far below, a gull flapped its wings and a steamer at the pier whistled hoarsely. Then a deep silence came down upon the island, and we three stood alone on the edge of the cliff—myself, Richard and the critic. Across the water the lights of a passing steamer winked out through the dusk, and the strains of the band in the

* Ah, Carrie, Carrie !—*R. de L.*

pavilion at the other end of the cliff broke out. Richard coughed and the critic turned. He recognised us, and his face grew pale and terror-stricken.

"Poltroon!" I hissed, "thine hour has come. No need for me to tell you that I am the avenging angel."

"You are allowed three minutes for the customary prayer," said Richard, consulting his watch. "If you would like to send a message to your friends I will take it."

The critic's head sank on his breast. "You needn't send any message to anybody. Kill me quickly and have done with it. I have an old coat at the Press Club. You can have it, De Lyrienne. There is a paper in the inside pocket which should interest you. It is about the Gilt-edged Girl."

I saw that Richard wavered, and I knew that delay would be fatal. These poets are so impressionable; he might seek to spare the critic's life.

Together we caught the critic by the shoulders and with a steady push sent him far out over the cliffs. A faint splash came up from the waters beneath, and the gulls fluttered about with terrified shrieks. Then there was silence.

HOW WE KILLED THE CRITIC

I wonder if critics drown easily.

(By Richard De Lyrienne.)

No wonder that I had wavered—it was Quillman. I don't suppose that one critic less will make much difference. I left Douglas the next morning. Carrie waited till the evening boat.

I wonder what the old coat at the Press Club will bring forth.

Chapter XX

Foiled

I HURRIED back to London. I seldom hurry ; it is too suggestive of the Spirit of the Age, which I hate. But this was vital. The old coat might mean much to me.

In the boat and on the train I thought, thought, thought. This Isle of Man, this Carrie Morelli, this critic. What harm had poor Quillman done me ? I blamed Carrie. I should have taken no hand in the business. For all I knew, Quillman might have been a real good man with the log. After all, critics had their place in the economy of literature. I myself did a little in the critical line. You know those columns in the *Pink One*, signed R. de L. ? Still, regrets were vain—and here was London. I had a 7s. 6d. dinner in a French restaurant behind the Empire, and then

hurried on to the Press Club, where I had never been before.

It is a dull, unsatisfactory place, the Press Club ; dingy, and full of stuffed fish. Now, if there is anything that jars upon the æsthetic soul, it is a stuffed fish. Even wax flowers are preferable.

I entered, and asked for the steward. They brought him.

"Quillman, one of your members," I said, with an appropriate touch of sadness in my tones, "has died suddenly. I am a relative ; I called for his coat ; he told me he left one here."

"Quillman, Quillman, Quillman," considered the steward. "Oh yes, I know. His coat ? Oh yes ; I know—a musty garment that has been lying here since—since 188—. Come this way, please."

I went that way. We approached an array of coats. The steward searched around, and discovered a vacant peg.

"The coat," he said, "seems to have gone," and he summoned a myrmidon. "Do you know anything of the coat that used to hang here ?" the steward asked him.

THE QUEST OF THE GILT-EDGED GIRL

"Sold yesterday to an old clo' man," was the reply.

"His address?" I queried anxiously.

I got his address, and left hurriedly.

The old clo' man, I found, had sold the coat to a maker of shoddy, whose "devil" had torn it to shreds ten minutes after the purchase.

Foiled! My only clue to the Gilt-edged Girl had failed.

With a sad heart I went home.

.

That night I reflected. I had had my Quest. I had enjoyed my Quest. I had not found the Gilt-edged Girl, but I would have no more Quest. Tomorrow I would do away with the stays—would send them to some charitable institution. I would look up Quillman's landlady, tell her the sad news, and then return to the poetic life.

Chapter XXI

After the Quest

I CALLED at Quillman's on a quiet August evening. As I passed through the Park I noted, with a tinge of sadness, that the leaves were yellowing, and that there were indications of the deciduous nature of things vegetable. "London in Autumn," I pondered; "how would that do for an article?" Rather newspaperiness, I admitted, but it all depends on the treatment. To the west, above the houses, there was that dull red band of sky which I love as I love all things London. I took to thinking of the Quest. It had been in vain. But, stay; not in vain. I had added to the sum of my experience, and what else is worth living for? And then, how excellent the excuse for an irresponsible itinerary! (I would have said "random," but that is John's title.) Revolving

these things in my mind, I approached the old abode of Quillman.

Again the door was opened by the demure elderly lady, whom I had taken, rightly enough, to be the landlady.

"I have called," I began, "as the bearer of sad tidings."

"Come inside, sir, please," said the lady; and I followed her into a small parlour, wherein were wax-flowers, oleographs, and a number of religious books. On the table I noticed *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *In the Holy Land*, Barnes *On the Old Testament*, *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*, Paley, Doddridge's *Expositor*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and a bundle of tracts.

The fair young girl, whom I had caught a glimpse of on my last visit, burst into the room. Seeing a stranger, she sought to go.

"Stay, my child, stay," said the demure elderly lady, her mother; "the gentleman brings sad news of Mr. Quillman."

The daughter sat down beside the mother, and I told my tale.

It was a sad tale, and the sadness was not alleviated

AFTER THE QUEST

by the fact that he owed the elderly lady and her only daughter £20, representing board and lodging for three months.

"You shall not suffer," I said magnanimously ; and I paid them twenty sovereigns from the little leather purse I got from Marsilia for remembrance. I handed them the little leather purse too, for I did not wish to remember Marsilia any more.

The elderly demure lady thanked me, with tears in her eyes. Mary (for that was her name) added her thanks in a voice that was full of poetry.

I stayed to talk, and heard the history of the little household. They belonged to the Plymouth Brethren, lived apart from the world, and depended, for their daily bread, upon lodgers.

"You will come to tea some evening next week," said the mother, as I stood at the door, saying good-bye.

"Do," pleaded Mary.

And I did.

.
.

Chapter XXII

Not the Gilt-edged Girl

IT is six years since I last filled my fountain-pen. I am a Plymouth Brother now, and never write a line. I live in Peckham, "and the men I knew are not here." To-day, on my way to Exeter Hall, I saw John Davidson in the Strand. I gave him a tract. It was entitled "Hell and Music Halls." He looked into my eyes suspiciously, but showed no sign of recognition. Indeed, I was quite safe, with my side whiskers, my wideawake felt hat and bottle-green overcoat.

You ask an explanation, and I answer "Mary." Mary did it. I married Mary. And that crash in the back parlour? That is merely little Richard falling through the Salvation Army drum, that I kindly store for my friend, Lieutenant Macpherson, who lives upstairs.

FINIS

“NIHIL AD REM”

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
London & Edinburgh



From a photograph

by Russell & Sons

G. S. STREET

SOME NOTES
OF A STRUGGLING GENIUS

By the Same Author

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BOY
QUALES EGO. A Book of Essays
THE WISE AND THE WAYWARD.
EPISODES

Some Notes Of a Struggling Genius

BY

G. S. STREET



JOHN LANE, *The Bodley Head*

London and New York

1898

COPYRIGHT, 1898
BY JOHN LANE

University Press, Cambridge, U. S. A.

Preface

WITH your permission I wish to write something about the publication of these notes, "to prevent criticism," as Brisk says in the play. Most of them were printed some four years ago in the "Pall Mall Gazette." There was little of them altogether, partly because I was not inclined to write more, partly because a more industrious person than I was kind enough to adopt the little manner of them, such as it was, and to prosecute it with better success: I thought I might as well stop.

But these things being so, I conceive that you may be annoyed by the reprinting of what follows. I am nervous about it. For when, some time ago, I took the liberty of publishing a little book of essays, I was told that I had committed an impertinence. My critic seemed to think that I had swindled anybody who had paid three and sixpence for the book, which the critic, by the way, had for nothing. Now the publication of this fresh impertinence is due to its publisher. I tried to dissuade

Preface

him, pointing out that we might both be sent to prison for our pains. He persisted, however, for some reason I am quite unable to fathom (this is not, please, said complacently), and he has a stronger will than I. So I gave way, and devoted my arguments to beating down the price, with a view to mitigation of sentence. (This ought not to bore you: we are all interested in prices now.) I beat it down to a shilling, and there it stuck. A shilling, net. There has been a great dispute in the more important and obvious division of contemporary literature about the merits of this net, as compared with a discount system. My own objection to the net system is that people write and abuse me because they have gained nothing by going to the stores to buy my books. However, it is not my affair. I am heartily sorry my book has cost you a shilling, or has not, as the case may be; I had far rather you had it for ninepence, but I am powerless to help you.¹

¹ I do not translate these figures into terms of American coinage as a compliment to American readers: firstly, because I do not know if the great discount war is waged in America; secondly, because American readers are richer than English readers; and, thirdly, because American readers do not read my books.

Preface

So much for the more important matter. As for the notes themselves, they were suggested by the conversation of a struggling genius, my friend. I say this frankly, because I would rather be thought unoriginal than autobiographical. The exposition of my own habits and sensations would not be amusing, and I have no intention of making it. The reviewer who thought that the title of the book referred to above — it was “*Quales Ego*” — meant “*What am I?*” was mistaken: I invited no such personal inspection. As it is, I have been accused of having held myself up to ridicule in another book, a little farcical attempt at the satire of a mode now something vanished. I did no such thing. Both that book and this are little farcical presentments of modes of life and points of view and phases of character which have met and amused me: the first person singular is an easy way of writing: neither that book nor this is personal to myself. I confess that I have read these notes — after some years — with a melancholy interest. They were, or seem to have been, written in good spirits. There is a cheerful vulgarity about them which I am glad to have achieved; I have even a faint hope that they may be called “breezy.”

Preface

I have been perforce so egotistical in this preface that a line or so more about myself will make little difference, although I am aware that the intrusion would become a better or a more important man. I have tried, in my way, to do better work than such trifles as these or "The Autobiography of a Boy," — work which has interested me seriously, and the result of which, whether failure or not, is more to me than success in a hundred farces. But our nonsense is dear to us all, I think : it means so much of mood and temper while it lasts, and it is apt to leave us so suddenly. I would then plead an excuse for being willing to see these trifles collected in a book over my name. All the same, I shall be grieved if you are annoyed, having paid a shilling. If you have not, there's an end of the matter.

G. S. S.

March, 1898.

Contents

	PAGE
HE PAWNS HIS WATCH	13
HIS SUPERIOR MIND	21
HIS INFERIOR STOMACH	29
HIS ANNOYING REPUTATION	35
ON THE FOLLY OF BEING POOR	41
ON THE JOYS OF BORROWING	51
ON DISTINGUISHED PEOPLE	59
ON WRITING AN ARTICLE	67
ON HARD WORK	77
ON HEALTHY EXERCISE	85
HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE	93

HE PAWNS HIS WATCH

Some Notes of A Struggling Genius



HE PAWNS HIS WATCH

THE sky was blue, the grass was green, and the birds sang, when I set forth to pawn my watch. There was a promise of spring in the air, and all nature mocked me. People went by in cabs as if nothing in particular were the matter, and the crossing-sweeper at the bottom of the street saluted me without a suspicion of irony. I very nearly stopped and told him.

I had long seen that it must come. The tragedy of my life has been that I could never manage to be in debt on a large scale. People who owe hundreds of thousands do not pawn their watches ;

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

they are never in want of "a tenner ready." I have a friend whose means of livelihood is an elaborate system of loans on life insurance policies ; at intervals, of course, a new loan on a new policy has to be contrived that the interest and premiums on the old may be paid, and this is a pleasant diversion in the monotony of my friend's life. The system is like an inverted pyramid, requiring continually a fresh apex. Some day, perhaps, that will not be forthcoming, and the whole edifice will topple over, and my friend will have to build anew. Meantime he is clothed in a fur coat, and fares sumptuously every day. But the few miserable hundreds which I owe bring me in no income at all. So it had to come. My borrowing powers were exhausted, and I had begun to hear the brutal suggestion that I should give up being a struggling genius and do some work. It had come to this, that I had no money to buy a dinner. As to Algernon in "Rhoda Fleming," so to me, dinner had always seemed a matter of course: you are

He Pawns his Watch

born, and you dine. Being a struggling genius teaches you many things. Sorrowfully I set forth to pawn my watch.

It was my own watch, and I could do what I liked with it. I had to repeat this to myself continually, for I was oppressed, vaguely but intolerably, by a feeling that I was doing some wicked, some criminal thing. I had not pawned my watch since I was an innocent, happy child at school. Then, so far as I remember, I had no scruples at all: but then it was for pleasure, now it was for subsistence; now for bread, then for cakes and ale. Every respectable person I passed in Pall Mall was a reproach to me; I looked askance at policemen. But, after all, it was our cruel social system, which refuses a "living wage" to genius, that was to blame; I sneered savagely at the Athenæum. It seemed hours before I reached the Strand and looked sympathetically at Trafalgar-square, associated in my mind with riots of the unemployed. "It is not generally known that the three balls at the

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

pawnbrokers' shops," etc., the anecdote in Charles Lamb about his friend, who always fell back upon this announcement when material for writing ran short, came suddenly into my head. O to be back among my books, remote from this horrible reality ! I looked into the window, as if making up my mind to buy something, and entered with the air of an inexperienced thief. The man inside was affable and pleasant, — so pleasant that I half thought of trying to borrow from him, "as between gentlemen," but reflected that our acquaintance was short.

It was done, and I had joined the ranks of the watchless. There is not a mile between the Strand and my rooms, and at least fifteen children asked me the time on the way. I became restless ; the money was accursed, and I loathed it. It is not difficult to get rid of a few pounds in an evening in London, if you like entertaining your friends.

"What's the time ?" "I'm not sure, sir ; I'll look at your watch." I was wide awake in a moment, and explained volubly that it had gone to

He Pawns his Watch

be cleaned. It would never do for him to know. I am not much of a hero to him as it is. He took a considerable time arranging my brushes, while I fidgeted in bed. But I felt secure for the moment. After breakfast I considered what else I could take to the affable man behind the counter. It must be something that would not be missed. I myself have moments in which I almost doubt the balance of advantage in being a struggling genius. You are master of your time, and can have a secret contempt for the slavery your friends are enduring at the bar or elsewhere; but your friends who do nothing are in better case than you. The possibilities of achievement may be exciting, but the humours of impecuniosity are monotonous. I cannot, therefore, reasonably expect Thompson to sympathise with me; in fact, I would rather he did not know I am a genius. I will preserve such shreds of heroism as remain to me. "What is it, Thompson?" "You left this on the dressing-table, sir." It was the pawn-ticket.

HIS SUPERIOR MIND

HIS SUPERIOR MIND

IN matters of opinion which remain matters of opinion only, you need not trouble to make up your mind. Indeed, to do so is in most cases merely a confession of imperfect knowledge or imperfect sympathies, a sign that you perceive only one side of the question. The more thoughtful attitude is Adrian Harley's shrug of the shoulders, "to show that he had no doubt there was a balance in the case — plenty to be said on both sides, which was the same to him as a definite solution."

But where, unhappily, opinion must be translated into action, this sort of solution will not do. Unless you are prepared to stand on a landing for ever, you must decide whether you want to go up-

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

stairs or down. And that is one of the reasons why I find life so fatiguing ; I never can decide. Duty is, of course, imperative ; prove to me that it is my duty to do this or that, and I will do it unflinchingly — to a certain extent. But I fear you will find it difficult to prove any such thing ; I have read a great deal of philosophy, and should require you to take your stand on some principle other than any *ipse dixit*. If I had lived in the days of Nero, I do not, to be quite frank, think I should have admitted it my duty to be burned for a Christian martyr ; I should have been open to conviction, but hard to be convinced. But these are large matters ; you will admit there are many questions in the daily round in which only one's personal gratification need be consulted. In any average alternative of these my mind is balanced with a perfect equilibrium, so perfect, in fact, that I cannot even begin to act. It has been pointed out that, if you hesitate whether to say Richard or William, to say either Wilchard or Rilchiam im-

His Superior Mind

plies a preference. I never get so far. For example, if I am not dining with anybody, I go to one of two places to dine by myself. I walk to the top of the street and then have to decide to which of them I will go, for one is to the east, the other to the west. I never by any chance decide until I have reached the top of the street, and then I stand still, balancing. If you think of it, there is really an infinite number of considerations involved in such a decision, — distance, cost, cooking, comparative quietude or noise, — and some of them are on one side, some on the other side. I stand balancing at the top of the street until very often there are six cabs waiting for me to take one, or a small crowd collects to look at me, or a policeman eyes me suspiciously. To be asked suddenly at breakfast whether I will have tea or coffee sends the blood rushing to my head. I admit I have paused a full minute in doubt whether first to help myself to marmalade or to take another piece of toast. Thus it is that a beautifully balanced mind,

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

a proof in theory of a high order of intelligence, becomes to me in practice a positive curse.

“That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it ——”

I look down on him from an immense height, but confess I envy him at breakfast. We have to suffer for our superior intellects, do we not?

They tell me I am not a good person with whom to discuss a plan of action. That is partly due to my balance of mind, but also to a certain discursiveness. I had agreed to go out of town with another man for Easter, and he came to debate with me the comparative advantages of the country and Paris. In the first half-hour of the discussion we settled that the eighteenth-century attitude towards life was agreeable, that four-wheeled cabs ought to be better than they are, and that Plato was a Buddhist; we differed about the merits of Sir Henry Irving's acting and the proper pronunciation of “Zounds.” In the next

His Superior Mind

hour we decided that we should like knee-breeches and three-cornered hats to be worn again, that a certain popular writer was a bore, that there would be a new age of faith, and that brandy before lunch was disastrous. We decided nothing about Paris and the country ; my friend left in a bad temper ; he wired to me to meet him at Victoria, and I, after an agony of indecision, missed the train. A discursive mind is a mind that sees resemblances, a poetic as distinguished from a scientific mind. It is a proud thing to have, but I sometimes wish I were a quite commonplace person. My mind is really a very fine thing ; it is beautifully open, richly stored with comparisons and similes, able to balance alternatives with the most perfect nicety — and I can never make it up.

HIS INFERIOR STOMACH

HIS INFERIOR STOMACH

NOW I mention it, it occurs to me there is a pretty close analogy between my stomach and my mind. But though I called the latter a superior mind, and rightly, I am justified in calling my stomach inferior. It all depends upon the point of view. Just as my mind — an excellent mind for metaphysic and all kinds of subtle analysis — is rather a failure in face of the petty decisions of daily life, so my stomach, a splendid organ in the larger sense of the word “stomach,” is unequal to acts of digestion which quite commonplace stomachs can achieve. Therefore, I am fain to call it inferior, because its vocation is clearly to digest.

I hope you will not think me lacking in delicacy for displaying this machinery to the world. I take an impersonal interest in the matter, and, in fact, a long series of divergences between my stomach and me has led me to regard it as a thing outside my-

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

self, a separate entity, so to speak, with its own ego, and all that sort of thing. Our relations are intimate, indeed, but neither friendly nor confidential. I confess I use plain terms to it, and its protests are unexpected and inconvenient, and so I hold myself free to criticise it with little ceremony. I have never sought its confidences; I have no scruple in using them as evidence against it.

As I said, it is a splendid stomach in the larger sense of the word. In this sense it is, of course, primarily a symbol of half our hopes and struggles here below. One of two great factors in life, the desire of self-preservation, has its dwelling-place here; the habit of acquisition and, indirectly, the desire to kill, receive hence their stimulus. Modern social customs keep these activities in subjection as regards their direct manifestation, but I have them, potentially, in a perfectly healthy state. If I see a desirable thing, I would take that thing; if a man opposed me, I would kill that man — but for public opinion. In a small

His Inferior Stomach

way I do what I can. I never return what I borrow until compelled, and keep to this day and gaze at with delight a shilling time-table I stole deliberately from a hotel. Also I once pushed a small boy on one side and took the last seat in a railway carriage before him. The indirect exercise of these activities — business transactions and so forth — are less in my way ; the mind has to operate, and mine is no good, as I have remarked, for common things. Consequently I fall between two stools, but that is not the fault of my stomach.

In another sense of the word the stomach is the symbol of a temperament and a philosophy. There are people in whom it is said to have replaced the heart. Theoretical materialism is, of course, exploded, in the old interpretation at least ; but I am perfectly consistent in my practical materialism. I keep no faded handkerchiefs in secret drawers, nor any violets under my pillow. I never bother about what might have been, never start and turn pale when I meet anybody

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

after long years. I cannot be sufficiently grateful to my stomach for freeing me from all these follies. It is an admirable philosopher, perfect in its serene contemplation.

But when it comes to digestion, it is a fool. If it could, it would limit me to a diet of air. It is absolutely capricious, and there is no known food or drink against which it has not protested at one time or another. It is the uncertainty that tries me most cruelly : I never know what I may eat or drink ; immunity in the past is no guarantee for the future. I could tell you of the most pathetic inconsistencies, of the most extraordinary experiences, but fear to be thought vulgar. Some people are so odd in this respect ; it would merely argue a want of refinement in yourself, but I would not annoy the least refined of my readers. From the refined all things are refined, nevertheless.

Am I not unfortunate ? A stomach that is a perfect philosopher in theory and in practice cannot digest. Oh, the irony of nature !

HIS ANNOYING REPUTATION

HIS ANNOYING REPUTATION

I AM willing to bear with resignation the ordinary lot of mortal man. Amateur theatricals, healthy walks, bilious suppers, and uneducated regenerators, — I take them as they come in the day's work. But when I find myself saddled with a reputation I have done nothing whatever to deserve, — a reputation which stands like a wall between me and the love of my fellow-men, and condemns me to everlasting bitterness and boredom, — I claim a right to protest against the universe. I am a clown *malgré moi*.

Whence the reputation comes I do not know. I look at myself in the glass, and see the reflection of a sober Englishman, bald and statesmanlike, with no infinite humour nor merry eye about me, — a simple, straightforward Saxon. It may be that to

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

others my face seems that of a natural low comedian ; I do not know. But I should have thought that even low comedians were allowed their moments of seriousness, allowed to share the sorrow and invite the sympathy of their friends : no such thing is allowed to me. Everybody I know is convinced that whatever I say, on whatever occasion, I intend to be funny. You remember the man in Catullus who smiled on every occasion, at pathetic speeches and funerals, and is reminded that nothing is more inept than inept laughter ? That is the sort of man I am supposed to be. Sometimes, even now, a friend will confide his sorrow to me ; but he does so with a beseeching look, as who should say : “ *Do* recognise that this is a serious matter, and *don't* attempt one of your silly jokes.” Then I say something appropriate and sympathetic, and immediately my friend smiles a sickly smile, and says probably that it is no laughing matter to *him*. All serious talk is hushed when I go into a room, and people sit with grins of pain-

His Annoying Reputation

ful expectation, many of them obviously bored by having to leave an interesting subject for inane laughter. If a genuinely funny man is there, they think me a tedious anticlimax. Moreover, I am not allowed to have any sorrows of my own; they are supposed to be invented for other people's amusement. A woman I know nearly had a fit when I told her how I had fallen off an omnibus. I think if my wife were to elope, this friend would laugh herself into apoplexy. I told a man the other day that my aunt Rebecca was dead — told him quite simply; he roared with laughter, and then rebuked me for making a jest of such things.

I am not only supposed to be destitute of all sympathy with human sorrow, but this reputation of clowning has earned me the reputation also of envy, malice, and all uncharitableness. Thus, if some pitiful lapse of virtue is mentioned to me, and I find excuse for the sinner, I am supposed to be sarcastic and a mean-minded fellow. I have an enemy whom, nevertheless, I honestly admire; if

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

I praise him, I am thought sarcastic again, and again mean-minded.

I am supposed to be not only a clown, but a stupid clown. But I put it to you : if every trivial and commonplace remark you made were criticised from the point of view of its being meant as a joke, could not you, too, be thought stupid ? The wittiest man alive would not stand such an ordeal. A remark about the weather, or about the political situation, an opinion on the newest religion, or the latest play, — anything I say is regarded as an attempted joke, and received with maddening indulgence.

And yet I solemnly protest to you I have never seriously made a joke in my life. I remember in early youth upsetting a cup of tea in my hat, and another time bumping my head against a hanging lamp. These are the only funny things that I have ever consciously done, and it is surely hard if they are responsible for a reputation which has made me the most miserable man in London.

ON THE FOLLY OF
BEING POOR

ON THE FOLLY OF BEING POOR

IT has occurred to me of late that we who despise money and deem no sum of it a fair recompense for disagreeable toil are in error. To put the matter shortly, I have come to think poverty a foolish thing. One was brought up in the contrary way of thinking, to be sure ; the delights and wisdom of poverty and the evils attendant on riches were pictured to our youthful imaginations until almost we wondered why any man took pains to be rich. This teaching was, indeed, counteracted to some extent by experience. Seeing that riches were as dirt, we may have thought it a small thing to ask our richer kinsmen to divest themselves of some small portion in our behalf ; we found that their view was different. But they went on with their teaching : they were charmed by the figures

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

of indigent merit and wealthy wickedness rampant in Charles Dickens. And at school, Diogenes his tub, and Socrates his simple fare, were held up to our admiration, the difference between the Greek and English climates being forgotten; and Horace, having celebrated (that he might eat Mæcenæ's oysters) the greatness of Augustus in inferior verse, sang, with perfect art, of the charms of cabbages. For myself, when I read Catullus' invitation to his friend to dine and to bring the dinner with him, for that the poet's purse was full of cobwebs, I was enchanted to a rapturous delight in the prospect, the very secure prospect, of poverty.

Certainly those of us who went on from school to a university found that money was rather useful. My own recollection of Oxford is that it held money in some regard; a youth with a few hundred pounds a year more than his fellows was called a "rich man," and was not, I think, shunned on that account. But in those days credit, that engine of national prosperity and in-

On the Folly of Being Poor

dividual collapse, temporarily removed those inequalities, and the real meaning of the matter was not brought home to us. So one went into the world with the belief that to do disagreeable work for money was not worth while, that money was altogether a secondary matter. It is to dissipate this belief, which I hold to be the cause of much discomfort, that these remarks are written. I would beseech my readers to be rich; I *know* that they will thank me in the end. Not that I wish them to be millionaires and monsters. By advising them to be rich I mean to recommend to them an income of ten thousand pounds a year or so — twenty thousand at the most.

To resume. I am aware that much may be said against my advice. I shall be told, I know, that your rich man is not allowed to be extravagant, lest he be thought vulgar: his wine must not be rare, nor his wife's jewels expensive. He is not allowed to be generous to his poor friends, lest he be thought to buy their friendship, whereas

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

your poor man need make no bones about unique port or lending money. But consider the other side. The rich man (a commercial argument for a commercial age) buys everything, especially money, more cheaply than the poor man; his money goes much further; he pays cash, not credit prices; he does not waste his money on paying interest, and insurance premiums, and lawyers' costs. Again, he has not to keep up appearances; he may dress shabbily and travel in third-class carriages. These are but a few of the advantages I have observed. Not, indeed, that I speak from experience of both states. But I have added to a personal acquaintance with poverty some observation of the rich, and I affirm without hesitation that their comfort is worth the unamiable and occasionally disgusting methods by which they procure it. It is possible I may be met with the familiar idea that riches may be sought in vain. But I am appealing to persons of superior intelligence. Anybody of average intelligence and elementary

On the Folly of Being Poor

common-sense can make money. Have you not met scores of men who have made money and whose general stupidity is beyond conception? Have you studied faces in the City? And anybody of superior intelligence and elementary common-sense can make a fortune. How many people of undoubted ability of mind and of proved commonplace wisdom are there who have taken pains to learn a trade, plied it patiently (stockbroking, company-promoting, provision-merchanting — any trade by which large fortunes can be made), and failed? You have no instance, I am very sure. I am very sure that a person of superior intelligence, — proved in science and letters, — will he but learn the trade of butchering patiently, may beat all the butchers in England, become a mammoth butcher, and found a county family. Yet there are scores of men of superior intelligence, men of science, painters, writers, who might be rich and are not. Some of them realise the advantages of wealth and make an effort; and

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

what do they do? They commit pot-boilers, hand-books of science, popular novels, and the like. I do not despise them for wishing to be rich; I despise them for their misplaced and inadequate endeavours. A popular author, I am told, may make some three or four thousand pounds a year. Go to Mr. Beit, thou fool, and ask him what he thinks of four thousand a year! To say nothing of the rent and riddled artistic conscience. I exhort these more or less impecunious delightful and intelligent persons to make money in the way in which millions are made. Let them go to the Stock Exchange, start stores, promote companies. In a few years names now familiar in the publishers' lists alone will head subscriptions to public funds, and there will be an artistic coterie in Park-lane. The drawbacks are not serious. To rise at nine, to turn out into broughams on rainy mornings, to talk to uninteresting people about cricket and the theatres, to affect prejudices from which they are free, to eat and drink more than they may require,—

On the Folly of Being Poor

these are small things. As for the intellectual operations required, they will become a habit, even a pleasurable habit. A successful man of business once told me he quite enjoyed making money, the fun and stimulus of the thing. And then, in a few years, free from sordid cares, with duns aloof and nerves placated, they will return to their artistic achievements. And I have kept the greatest inducement to the end. You can do so much good if you are rich.

ON THE JOYS OF BORROWING

ON THE JOYS OF BORROWING

I DO not mean asking a famous financier down to your place to shoot, and concluding a dignified and magnificent mortgage ere he drives away. Nor do I refer to borrowing half a crown from the butler. These extreme incidents of an advanced civilisation are not my theme, but rather that middle course appertaining to modest men, who are not without a shilling for a cab, but "simply must" raise a few hundreds before Thursday week.

There is, as Charles Lamb has told us, a "great race" of borrowers, great and grand men who "call all the world up to be taxed," irresistible, genial fellows, who "anticipate no excuse and find none." Alas! either we are fallen on a mean age, or the present writer is not of this race, for he finds the excuses of destined borrowees inexhaustible. Mean, sordid, commercial excuses they are,

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

lamentably wanting in nobility and frankness. As a rule, indeed, the excuses insult you by their utter inadequacy. One man has promised his grandmother never to lend; another has promised your great-aunt never to lend to *you*. That, by the way, is an instance of the depth of malignancy possible to some people: they not only will not lend themselves, but go out of their way to prevent other people acting in a more generous spirit, as a sort of cowardly cloak and support to their own meanness. I suppose they are infected by the popular paradoxes of the period when they say they wish "to save you from yourself," but the remark has always seemed to me as heartless as it is foolish. When excuses fail your friends, you meet with blank refusals. Few people, of course, are such savages as to say "No" with a serious air; and if it is still a question of Thursday week and not of next Thursday, you may enjoy their attempted joviality. "Want five hundred? My dear fellow, so do I. I wish you'd tell me how to

On the Joys of Borrowing

get it.” You turn from this clown to another, who says: “A monkey? I hope you’ll get it: I could n’t raise a pony if I tried.” And then the brute goes home to his large (and unencumbered) house and indulges a huge appetite. A third pretends to believe you are in fun, and tells you a professedly amusing story about a man who went to Holloway. You laugh to keep him in a good humour; but “it ain’t never no good,” to use the phrase of a philosopher.

Your friends failing, you think of professional relievers of the distressed. Alas! again. The habitual insolvent knows that this also is vanity. Arrived at years of discretion, he reflects, not so much on exorbitant interest — which, if he must have the money by next Thursday, he does not mind — as on the little matter of security. Perchance, however, he remembers his guileless youth, what time he went the round of all the money-lenders in town; remembers the awful moments in the ante-rooms of the great ones, the old masters

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

and ancient armour, and then the very polite but searching questions, and the bland but impregnable refusal. Or he remembers, perchance, calling on one of the little ones, who received him in his shirt-sleeves. “ ’Undred, capting? ’Ave two ’undred. ’Ave five ’undred.” “ Thank you, I’ll have five hundred.” “ We shall ’ave to send a man to look at yer ’ouse.” But the roof which sheltered the youthful financier from the wind and rain sheltered also his people, and so the proposal collapsed. Remembering these things, the habitual insolvent reflects that years, which have brought wisdom, have not brought security or a house of his own. Bills of sale are vulgar things, and you may not be aware that insurance offices require two householders as sureties before they will lend you money. They do indeed.

Yes, the way of the borrower, the modest borrower, is hard. But there are compensations. Though he may not be of “ the great race,” he has yet his moments of exaltation. After the first

On the Joys of Borrowing

depression, the absolute necessity of raising that five hundred gives one a pleasant glow, a feeling of breadth and openness, a generous good-fellowship, a devil-may-care jollity. You are freed from the very pettiest of economies. When you recognise the necessity of raising many pounds at a coup, it is plain folly to take care of the pence. What are beer and 'buses to you? You take a hansom by the day and see that your brand of champagne is of a good year. You dare not let yourself think, and so you go round the town. The feeling is very like (I should imagine) that of coming suddenly into a fortune. But one who comes suddenly into a fortune cannot indulge his feeling of expansiveness, for fear of being thought vulgar, whereas the loan-hunter is a spendthrift chartered by all nice people.

A pleasant time, and it cannot last long enough for its joys to pall. That is so satisfactory to remember. Thursday week is on its way, and then — and then ——

ON DISTINGUISHED PEOPLE

ON DISTINGUISHED PEOPLE

DON'T you hate them? They are so irrelevant.

Of course, until the dead level of mediocrity, which we are told is coming, is reached, there must be distinguished people, not merely of the distinction produced by purple faces and outré attire, but people of real distinction, who have discovered America or been interviewed in the papers. I have no objection to their existence; on the contrary, when they get into the Divorce Court or do anything amusing, their distinction gives an additional attraction to the affair. I like, too, to read about their back-yards, and that sort of thing; it passes the time, and puts no strain on the reasoning faculties or imagination. I read a book once called "Celebrated Friends of Mine," or something of the kind. I had never heard of

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

most of them, and a quite appalling amount of virtue was recorded about them all; but I enjoyed reading about their meat-teas and babies and other things which would not have been mentioned if the author had not thought they were really distinguished people. I love trivialities, in fact, and if it were not for distinguished people should miss a great deal: one would be restricted to reading of Labour problems and somebody's religion. Long live distinguished people, they and their lunches, liaisons, lamp-shades, and latch-keys!

But I detest meeting them. I don't care who they are, great warriors, travellers, scientists, women with missions, or young men with indecently apparent futures—I don't wish to meet them. When they are expected, and fail to come, I am relieved, and so I believe is every other insignificant person present, except, perhaps, your hostess and the creatures who like to boast of having met So-and-so. And my reason is that the irrelevant character of their distinction is seldom in reality admitted.

On Distinguished People

Sometimes, of course, they are vulgar, blatant people who monopolise the conversation, or rather annihilate it, who insist on trotting themselves out. Sometimes also of course your host or hostess is a lion-hunter, who will not leave the good people alone, and insists on their boring you to death against their will. In fairness I put those cases on one side. We will suppose that distinguished person and entertainer alike are well-conducted and amiable people, and that no unprovoked reference is made to the distinction. Still, in some subtle manner you feel its presence, feel that the great man's opinion of the last new play is thought of more importance than yours, whereas in all probability he has devoted less time than you to such matters and his opinion is comparatively valueless. The core of the question is that in social life only social qualities should be considered; all else is irrelevant. Sometimes, indeed, the distinction is a guarantee of sociability. Your great warrior will probably be pleasant company, because there

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

is a tradition of modesty in the army. But if you are set to talk with a dull dog, what recompense is it to know that he has discovered a new black-beetle? Why should a man of disagreeable manners be tolerated socially because he has written an even more disagreeable book? Distinction of almost any kind should, in fact, be counted against and not for a man socially, because its existence begets a vague feeling of anticipation inimical to agreeable intercourse. A man's distinction should be considered socially as something he has to live down. When he has done so I will tolerate him, but in a general way I don't want to meet him. These remarks are not inspired by injured vanity.

One word more. Why should we be asked to read an ill-written essay on a subject of which the writer is obviously ignorant, because he is distinguished in some other connection? If an essay on boot-blackening is required, surely it should be written either by somebody who understands boot-blackening, or by somebody who can charm by his

On Distinguished People

writing, so that the subject is immaterial. As a matter of fact, it will probably be written by Dr. This, who knows all about Hindoo temples, and nothing about boot-blackening, and writes anyhow; or, failing him, by Lady That, because her name is familiar to readers of "society" papers. But since the attack is on distinguished people and not on the British public, it is enough to remark that they are irrelevant again. Here, too, they should live their distinction down, and get up their subjects or try to write. It is difficult to determine how a good autocrat should deal with them. Perhaps they should be offered a choice between a strict incognito when remote from their special fields of activity (and interviewers) and a comparatively painless death. But when they tell me the insignificant person is about to have his day, and therefore that no more "Celebrated Friends of Mine" can be written, I think it is a pity.

ON WRITING AN ARTICLE

ON WRITING AN ARTICLE

WHEN you glance at an average article — I pay you the compliment of supposing you do no more than glance — you are in the habit of saying, “Any fool could have written this.” That, at least, was my own invariable reflection, with (I confess) the further one that I, who am no fool, could have written it far better. I used to compute that I could write about six ordinary articles before lunch, and it seemed an easy and comfortable way of earning a livelihood. It seemed an agreeable life. I would breakfast in a civilised way at ten, write my six articles in a pleasant, casual, slippered way, and stroll into Piccadilly at two, with the rest of my day for pleasure. Thus I should earn (a few figures proved it) about fifty pounds a week, being four times a colonel’s half-pay, or

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

nearly as much as a music-hall singer's income. There was, indeed, the objection that the life was too easy, possibly, for the dignity of man ; that it gave too little employment to the energies and intellect of a noble specimen of the race ; that Carlyle would have been rude about it. But (I reflected) obvious work is not the only employment of faculties ; at afternoon tea, on a race-course, in a theatre, one's faculties may be in full use, one's intellect alert and worthily employed ; life and human nature are worthy the study of a thinking man. As for Carlyle, I happened to be a Utilitarian, and he had called Utilitarianism a " pig philosophy ; " I cared little for what Carlyle would have thought.

So I gave up my chance of a career elsewhere, and came to London to write articles. Having established myself in a manner suitable to a man who was going to make fifty pounds a week, and add six bricks to his house of reputation every day, I dropped in on an editor and told him what I

On Writing an Article

intended to do. I was careful to avoid any appearance of intellectual arrogance, and concealed my contempt for the models he suggested to me. I even remarked, with a pleasant smile, that he might not care for my articles, and liked the humility with which he replied that they might be above his comprehension. We exchanged these courtesies for a while, and then, "By the way," he said, "on what subjects can you write?" I answered, "Oh, anything," and he simply said, "I see." With this *carte blanche* I left him. It was natural I should be a little elated, seeing success in clear view, and it was wise to work off a little excess of spirits in the amusements of the town. But a week later I sat down seriously to my task.

It was rather difficult to choose a subject. When you come to think of it, there is really a huge number of things in the world. Being of a literary habit, books suggested themselves to me. I thought of a critique of Mr. Swinburne, or a study of Byron. But this was criticism, and I wished to create, think-

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

ing — in those days — that the creative was the finer faculty. Besides, such subjects are not quite apposite, perhaps, not of the sort for which mere newspapers care. Moreover, the editor had suggested a humorous article. I thought of a comic article on Registration (about which people were then talking) in the style of the "Pilgrim's Progress," but made little way with the idea. A translation of Tacitus' account of the ancient Germans, with modern examples, was a bright conception, but I could not work it, as I had never been in Germany. A description of a play in the style of Pepys was vetoed by the editor, who said it was stale.

It was very difficult to choose a subject. Books failing me, I went into the world of men in search of humour. Before I had purposely looked for them I was always encountering humorous incidents; now I saw few, and those not convenient to my purpose. A man going under a ladder received a dab of paint on his hat, but my "Perils of the

On Writing an Article

Pavement" ran to half a page only. I followed a drunken man all down the Strand, but he only hiccupped. I went all over London on an omnibus to catch the driver's humorous remarks, but you can make little of "igher up." I underpaid a cabman in the hope of a humorous repartee, but he simply called a policeman.

It was impossible to choose a subject. My friends' suggestions were useless. One suggested Tommy X., who always stayed till one when asked to dinner; an article on Tommy would, I was told, be a service to society. But I owe Tommy half a sovereign, and it seemed unfair to hold him up to public hatred. Another suggested the cooking at his club; a third the repairing of the clock on the tower of St. James's Palace. The funny man of "my circle" made an obvious pun, and thought I could expand it into a humorous article.

Oh, yes, any fool can write the article, but you must give him the subject. The difficulty nearly drove me mad. I would sit biting my pen at my

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

writing-table after breakfast and pace up and down the room for hours. Instead of finishing six articles by lunch-time, I had merely eaten six pens. I took long walks to clear my head. I plunged into dissipation by reason of my despair. I could not sleep. My projected article got on my nerves so completely that I was unfit for social intercourse. I developed the worst faults of the copy-hunting journalist, and all without writing a line that could be printed. When a subject came I could not deal with it ; my mind went a-gadding to another before I had arranged the most elementary scheme. The most delightful subject that ever delighted Sterne would have seemed to me simply not worth while. The responsibility was more than I could bear.

At last, having tried the whole world of noble ideas and humorous incidents, I went crestfallen to my editor, who told me to write an article on an old woman who had swallowed her teeth. Not, you will suppose, an extremely diverting or inspiring subject, but the responsibility of selection

On Writing an Article

removed, one could find words. I do not know if anybody laughed over my article, but at least it was brought to an end and printed, and I could regard the universe with some equanimity again. Therefore, when you hear of fine scholars, erudite and experienced, bringing their powers to bear upon some ignoble and dictated subject, do not pity them. If they must write articles, they are a thousand times more fortunate than the writer who may choose his theme from all the world.

ON HARD WORK

ON HARD WORK

I CONFESS I loathe work of any kind or quality whatsoever. My idea of a happy life is to lock myself in a room at the end of a long passage, the passage also with a locked door, in a house surrounded by a large park, the park also surrounded by a high wall, and to sit there, not talking, or reading, or admiring the scenery, — simply to sit. But I am quite ready to admit that I must work. I must work, steal, or starve, and I am not clever enough to steal and not the sort of person to starve, and, besides, am very conscientious. I am willing to work, and have plenty of work to do ; my difficulty is to find the time.

Take an average day. You get up, and you have breakfast. I suppose you a conscientious person, whose breakfast is not contained in a

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

glass, but who fights down a robust egg and some bacon; all that takes time. Then you have to read the morning paper; to neglect it is to have nothing to talk about to your elderly relations, and savours of academic arrogance. Then if you are neither rich enough to keep a man who will shave you, nor extravagant enough to have a man in to do it, you have to go out to be shaved, and that means putting on your boots. It is no use to deny it; you can't start a beard without going into the country for a month, and your work keeps you in town. If you begin one in town, people will say you want to be thought a genius. Very good. You go out to be shaved, and that brings you up to lunch-time. The late Sir Andrew Clark said that brain-workers need a meat-lunch, and a meat-lunch requires sedentary digestion. That brings you to about half-past three, when, to keep in good health, you must take an hour's constitutional. At half-past four you must go and have tea somewhere, unless you are void of human

On Hard Work

sympathies, and ungrateful to those who have dined you. It is time when you return to your home to dress for dinner; or perhaps you have half an hour to write letters in. You dine; and you digest. Suppose you dine out: you can't rush away the moment you have finished eating—it looks so materialistic. Suppose you dine at home; are you never to play a game of billiards, never to go to a play? You might as well live in a desert. It follows that you can't get to work before half-past twelve, which is an absurd and suicidal time at which to begin a *magnum opus*. You go to bed.

That is an average day, and see how barren it is. I have said nothing about going to church, or love-making, or dancing, or playing cards, let alone work. To work, it is clear, you must live an unnatural and hermit-like life. I have tried it, and will tell you the result. I rose early, hurried over all my meals, and took no constitutional. I went to nobody, no, not I, and nobody came to

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

me. The result was that I put in just two hours of good solid work. What with the clock ticking, and the fire going out, and leaving my pencil in the other room, and getting a frantic headache by three in the afternoon, two hours were the whole result.

I do not wish to say anything paradoxical, but it really seems to me that the longer time you give to work, the shorter time you work. The more you shut yourself up, and shut out your friends, and generally make a slave of yourself, the less work you get done. It is like trying to economise money. I have tried that too; I tried it for a whole day. I shaved myself, and the chemist charged me half a crown for oil and plaster, and things to patch myself with. I cadged on some people for lunch, and the boy of the house reminded me that I owed him a sovereign. I went back on the top of an omnibus, and my hat blew off and was run over by a cab. I stayed at home all the afternoon to save boot leather, and

On Hard Work

four men came to see me, drank a bottle of whisky and three siphons of soda-water and smoked half a box of cigars. I walked home from the house where I dined, two miles in the rain, and spoiled another hat and a new pair of pumps. There were other disasters which I forget, but my total expenses on that day of economy came to nearly £10. My average income is about half a crown a week, and I therefore determined I could not afford economy. It is so with work. There is, moreover, another objection to working hard, beside the one that it means getting no work done. The objection may not apply to breaking stones, but it does to my particular work at least, which is writing novels. The sort of novel I intend to write is a very actual and up-to-date sort of novel, a satire on modern manners. How am I to satirise modern manners if I do not go about and observe them? Of course I must go to dinners, and balls, and music-halls, and other places where you meet actual people. I suppose the other fellows who

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

write clever novels do these things ; I suppose they do not sit at home always and evolve their descriptions of modern manners from their inner consciousness of what is fit, and from the conversation of the housemaids ; but how do they find the time ?

I wish they would tell me, for my conclusion, that the only way to work is to be absolutely idle, is very sad. I want so much to be honest and to earn my living.

ON HEALTHY EXERCISE

ON HEALTHY EXERCISE

PERSONALLY I regard it as an anachronism, and would rather do without it. Our bodies will ultimately conform to changed conditions of civilisation, and then nobody will need it. I am inclined to think my own body is all right, thank you, even now, and that if I kept the matches where I could not reach them without standing up, and walked round the room while I fastened my collar, it would be exercise enough. My doctor suggests that after a few years of this regimen it would be enough exercise for anybody else to walk round *me*. It sounds as if it might be an old joke. I give it for what it is worth ; in any case, scientific truth was sacrificed to it. However, I comply with the times, which insist we should all be fine athletic Englishmen.

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

I am therefore (please understand) a fine athletic Englishman. But every man has a right to be fine and athletic in his own way, and I draw the line at certain pastimes. Football, for instance, is a horrid game. To look on is all very well; to see one's fellow-creatures coated with mud and bumping against one another gives one a pleasant sense of superiority; but if you don't mind, I'd rather not play it. Cricket compels you to hurry over lunch and makes you too hot to have a glass of port with your cheese,—one of those ancient customs against the disuse of which I in my humble way like to protest.

However, the matter is a relative one: it is exercise in London. Everybody knows the difficulties. Many people surmount them by taking the train to somewhere else; but that is, I think, more than can be reasonably demanded of me. I did not invent London; if my fellow-countrymen chose to make it, they have no right to object that I choose to live in it. I will not leave town except com-

On Healthy Exercise

fortably to take my ease. I refuse, therefore, to join a rowing club or to play golf on Wimbledon Common, or go for any purpose whatever to Wormwood Scrubbs. The matter is reduced to exercise possible in town. What is there? There is the ride before breakfast, which people who know I breakfast in bed assure me they take. For that matter, there is the ride after breakfast. But unless some philanthropic plutocrat removes a certain difficulty, it means for me neither breakfast nor dinner: that is, if I were to ride a horse; of course there is bicycling, but bicycling — well, I don't bicycle. I have tried boxing. If by boxing you mean putting on flannels, strolling round a gymnasium, and then having a bath, I agree it is an agreeable amusement. But to be shown that my head is too far forward by a blow on the nose, or too far back by a blow on the stomach, does not amuse me at all. Fencing is a muddling sort of thing; it seems to mix up intellect with exercise, and I like to keep them distinct. There are

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

places where you can play lawn tennis, but they are chiefly a sort of communistic gardens in South Kensington, where people you don't know look on and seem to think they can play better. Besides, lawn tennis is impossible in winter, "*habebis frigora febrem.*" When I was a young fellow I used to play croquet; there is little opportunity for that now. It always seems absurd to me to take so violent an exercise as dancing in a stiff white shirt; and it is to be taken only at unwholesome hours. In London, where one's friends live leagues apart, and are as difficult to reach, save in expensive cabs, as if they lived in Wales, there are certainly opportunities for walking. But walking in London clothes is impossible on a wet day, and on a fine day one is too much exhilarated to do anything so stupid. A Turkish bath is excellent in theory: to sit or lie down while somebody else does the exercise is quite my idea; but he pommels and hurts.

My claims to being considered an athlete? Some time ago somebody put forward the theory that

On Healthy Exercise

yawning is a wholesome and invigorating exercise. I go into intellectual society and the gallery at the House of Commons and yawn. It is a high price, but I pay it to comply with the times. I laugh when I can, but melodramas at the Adelphi run for so long, and I don't laugh after the third visit. I can do nothing more robust than smile at pathetic stories, and it takes so many smiles to tire me out. Still, I do what I can, take these and a few other forms of exercise, and play my part in the national ideal. But I sometimes wish I belonged to another nation. I am proud to be an athlete, but it bores me.

HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE

HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE

MY friend said I ought to have one. She said it was sad to see me drifting “from day to day” — I notice that people pronounce such meaningless superfluities of speech with especial significance — without an object, without a purpose in life. I said my purpose in life was to live, thinking to summarise the late Professor Green’s philosophy, but she waved the remark aside as a vapid pun. When I asked her to define a purpose in life, she said it was a goal. A goal ! The word has a beautiful, restful sound, and suggests to a poet’s fancy a village public-house at the end of a healthy walk. But I take leave to assert that a goal is a stupid sort of thing to keep for your life’s familiar. It is not expedient to have your eye ever on a probable event, to which all your actions

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

are meant to conduce, to consider each day as bringing you nearer to a goal. For the joys of life are in unexpected moments: anticipate in imagination the commonest pleasure, and when it comes it is vain; much more, then, is the un wisdom of keeping one supreme pleasure in constant view. Besides, if you slave all you know for years to reach your goal, and die a hundred yards off it, what a fool you will feel!

I pointed this out to my friend, who said something about Browning, but gave up her goal and suggested a career. If there is a word I hate it is that word "career." It recalls the dreadful, complacent people who are succeeding and let you know it, people whom I live to avoid. It is like a long high-road, with mile-posts, and prim hedges, and flat fields on either side. The most amiable people are they who go zigzag, and after them the people who stay still. When you can prophesy with certainty of a man that in so many years he will be a retired colonel or a consul or a Q. C., he ceases

His Purpose in Life

to interest imagination. Now, nobody can say of me if in ten years I shall be in the workhouse, or a waiter, or a sandwich man. A career is a base, mechanic, calculating course ; I will none of it.

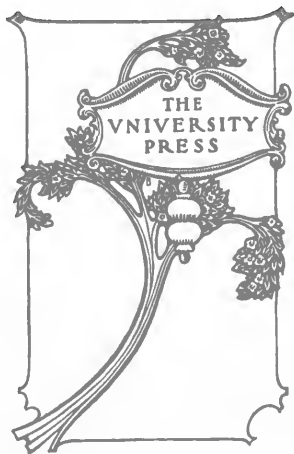
My friend proposed I should write a *magnum opus*, and would not accept my excuse that I was no Fellow of a college that I should do this thing. I had several objections. The first of them was that you cannot finish a *magnum opus* before lunch. I detest a mass of manuscript lying all over the place, getting mixed up with one's invitations and summonses and things. I like to be orderly, to finish my work, and send it off to the editor before I put on my collar. My private opinion is, of course, that the shortest of my productions is a *magnum opus* ; but in England literature is reckoned by its quantity, like tea, and a *magnum opus* implies a great hulking book. It seemed to me that to plan deliberately to write a book of more than a hundred pages was to take oneself absurdly seriously, and my sense of humour stood in the way. I did,

Some Notes of a Struggling Genius

however, entertain the proposal for a while, and thought of a collection of bad puns, or a catalogue of celebrities forgotten in the last five years, or something of the sort. If I could but have decided on a title, I might have satisfied my friend — but I could not.

I am still without a purpose in life, unless the purpose to get a purpose be one. I look out for it wherever I go, and have thought at various times of many, such as a League of Drunkards, the Abolition of Funny Articles, and the Degradation of the Drama, — purposes of which I may some day give you an account. But as yet not one has stirred all that is noble and so forth in me. If you can give me one, I should be obliged; meantime I take the liberty of living in a sort of way without it.

Here ends Some Notes of a Struggling Genius
by G. S. Street. Printed for John Lane,
by the University Press, Cambridge, U. S. A.,
in May, m dccc xcvi



THE HEADSWOMAN

By the Same Author

THE GOLDEN AGE
PAGAN PAPERS

The Headswoman

BY

KENNETH GRAHAME



JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK AND LONDON

1898

Copyright, 1898,
BY JOHN LANE.
All rights reserved.

The Headswoman



I

IT was a bland, sunny morning of a mediæval May, — an old-style May of the most typical quality; and the Council of the little town of St. Radegonde were assembled, as was their wont at that hour, in the picturesque upper chamber of the Hôtel de Ville, for the dispatch of the usual municipal business. Though the date was early sixteenth century, the members of this particular town-council possessed considerable resemblance to those of similar assemblies in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and even the nineteenth centuries, in a general absence of any characteristic at all — unless a pervading hopeless insignificance

The Headswoman

can be considered as such. All the character in the room, indeed, seemed to be concentrated in the girl who stood before the table, erect, yet at her ease, facing the members in general and Mr. Mayor in particular; a delicate-handed, handsome girl of some eighteen summers, whose tall, supple figure was well set off by the quiet, though tasteful mourning in which she was clad.

“Well, gentlemen,” the Mayor was saying, “this little business appears to be — er — quite in order, and it only remains for me to — er — review the facts. You are aware that the town has lately had the misfortune to lose its executioner, — a gentleman who, I may say, performed the duties of his office with neatness and dispatch, and gave the fullest satisfaction to all with whom he — er — came in contact. But the Council has already, in a vote of condolence, expressed its sense of the — er — striking qualities of the deceased. You are doubt-

The Headswoman

less also aware that the office is hereditary, being secured to a particular family in this town, so long as any one of its members is ready and willing to take it up. The deed lies before me, and appears to be — er — quite in order. It is true that on this occasion the Council might have been called upon to consider and examine the title of the claimant, the late lamented official having only left a daughter, — she who now stands before you ; but I am happy to say that Jeanne — the young lady in question — with what I am bound to call great good-feeling on her part, has saved us all trouble in that respect, by formally applying for the family post, with all its — er — duties, privileges, and emoluments ; and her application appears to be — er — quite in order. There is therefore, under the circumstances, nothing left for us to do but to declare the said applicant duly elected. I would wish, however, before I — er — sit down, to make

The Headswoman

it quite clear to the — er — fair petitioner, that if a laudable desire to save the Council trouble in the matter has led her to a — er — hasty conclusion, it is quite open to her to reconsider her position. Should she determine not to press her claim, the succession to the post would then apparently devolve upon her cousin Enguerrand, well known to you all as a practising advocate in the courts of this town. Though the youth has not, I admit, up to now proved a conspicuous success in the profession he has chosen, still there is no reason why a bad lawyer should not make an excellent executioner; and in view of the close friendship — may I even say attachment? — existing between the cousins, it is possible that this young lady may, in due course, practically enjoy the solid emoluments of the position without the necessity of discharging its (to some girls) uncongenial duties. And so, though not the rose her-

The Headswoman

self, she would still be — er — near the rose ! ” And the Mayor resumed his seat, chuckling over his little pleasantry, which the keener wits of the Council proceeded to explain at length to the more obtuse.

“ Permit me, Mr. Mayor,” said the girl, quietly, “ first to thank you for what was evidently the outcome of a kindly though misdirected feeling on your part ; and then to set you right as to the grounds of my application for the post to which you admit my hereditary claim. As to my cousin, your conjecture as to the feeling between us is greatly exaggerated ; and I may further say at once, from my knowledge of his character, that he is little qualified either to adorn or to dignify an important position such as this. A man who has achieved such indifferent success in a minor and less exacting walk of life, is hardly likely to shine in an occupation demanding punctuality, concentration, judg-

The Headswoman

ment, — all the qualities, in fine, that go to make a good business man. But this is beside the question. My motive, gentlemen, in demanding what is my due, is a simple and (I trust) an honest one, and I desire that there should be no misunderstanding. It is my wish to be dependent on no one. I am both willing and able to work, and I only ask for what is the common right of humanity, — admission to the labour market. How many poor toiling women would simply jump at a chance like this which fortune, by the accident of birth, lays open to me ! And shall I, from any false deference to that conventional voice which proclaims this thing as ‘ nice,’ and that thing as ‘ not nice,’ reject a handicraft which promises me both artistic satisfaction and a competence ? No, gentlemen ; my claim is a small one, — only a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work. But I can accept nothing less, nor

The Headswoman

consent to forgo my rights, even for any contingent remainder of possible cousinly favour ! ”

There was a touch of scorn in her fine contralto voice as she finished speaking ; the Mayor himself beamed approval. He was not wealthy, and had a large family of daughters ; so Jeanne’s sentiments seemed to him entirely right and laudable.

“ Well, gentlemen,” he began briskly, “ then all we’ve got to do, is to —— ”

“ Beg pardon, your worship,” put in Máster Robinet, the tanner, who had been sitting with a petrified, Bill-the-Lizard sort of expression during the speechifying : “ but are we to understand as how this here young lady is going to be the public executioner of this here town ? ”

“ Really, neighbour Robinet,” said the Mayor, somewhat pettishly, “ you’ve got ears like the rest of us, I suppose ; and you know the contents of the deed ; and

The Headswoman

you've had my assurance that it's — er — quite in order; and as it's getting towards lunch-time ——”

“But it's unheard of,” protested honest Robinet. “There has n't ever been no such thing — leastways not as I've heard tell.”

“Well, well, well,” said the Mayor, “everything must have a beginning, I suppose. Times are different now, you know. There's the march of intellect, and — er — all that sort of thing. We must advance with the times — don't you see, Robinet? — advance with the times!”

“Well, I'm ——” began the tanner.

But no one heard, on this occasion, the tanner's opinion as to his condition, physical or spiritual; for the clear contralto cut short his obstestations.

“If there's really nothing more to be said, Mr. Mayor,” she remarked, “I need not trespass longer on your valuable time.

The Headswoman

I propose to take up the duties of my office to-morrow morning, at the usual hour. The salary will, I assume, be reckoned from the same date; and I shall make the customary quarterly application for such additional emoluments as may have accrued to me during that period. You see I am familiar with the routine. Good-morning, gentlemen!" And as she passed from the Council chamber, her small head held erect, even the tanner felt that she took with her a large portion of the May sunshine which was condescending that morning to gild their deliberations.

The Headswoman

II

ONE evening, a few weeks later, Jeanne was taking a stroll on the ramparts of the town, a favourite and customary walk of hers when business cares were over. The pleasant expanse of country that lay spread beneath her — the rich sunset, the gleaming, sinuous river, and the noble old château that dominated both town and pasture from its adjacent height — all served to stir and bring out in her those poetic impulses which had lain dormant during the working day; while the cool evening breeze smoothed out and obliterated any little jars or worries which might have ensued during the practice of a profession in which she was still something of a novice. This evening she felt fairly happy and content. True, business

The Headswoman

was rather brisk, and her days had been fully occupied ; but this mattered little so long as her modest efforts were appreciated, and she was now really beginning to feel that, with practice, her work was creditably and artistically done. In a satisfied, somewhat dreamy mood, she was drinking in the various sweet influences of the evening, when she perceived her cousin approaching.

“ Good-evening, Enguerrand,” cried Jeanne, pleasantly ; she was thinking that since she had begun to work for her living, she had hardly seen him — and they used to be such good friends. Could anything have occurred to offend him ?

Enguerrand drew near somewhat moodily, but could not help allowing his expression to relax at sight of her fair young face, set in its framework of rich brown hair, wherein the sunset seemed to have tangled itself and to cling, reluctant to leave it.

The Headswoman

“Sit down, Enguerrand,” continued Jeanne, “and tell me what you’ve been doing this long time. Been very busy, and winning forensic fame and gold?”

“Well, not exactly,” said Enguerrand, moody once more. “The fact is, there’s so much interest required nowadays at the courts that unassisted talent never gets a chance. And you, Jeanne?”

“Oh, I don’t complain,” answered Jeanne, lightly. “Of course, it’s fair-time just now, you know, and we’re always busy then. But work will be lighter soon, and then I’ll get a day off, and we’ll have a delightful ramble and picnic in the woods, as we used to do when we were children. What fun we had in those old days, Enguerrand! Do you remember when we were quite little tots, and used to play at executions in the back-garden, and you were a bandit and a buccaneer, and all sorts of dreadful things, and I used to chop

The Headswoman

off your head with a paper-knife? How pleased dear father used to be!"

"Jeanne," said Enguerrand, with some hesitation, "you've touched upon the very subject that I came to speak to you about. Do you know, dear, I can't help feeling — it may be unreasonable, but still the feeling is there — that the profession you have adopted is not quite — is just a little ——"

"Now, Enguerrand!" said Jeanne, an angry flash sparkling in her eyes. She was a little touchy on this subject, the word she most affected to despise being also the one she most dreaded, — the adjective "unladylike."

"Don't misunderstand me, Jeanne," went on Enguerrand, imploringly: "you may naturally think that, because I should have succeeded to the post, with its income and perquisites, had you relinquished your claim, there is therefore some personal feeling in my remonstrances. Believe me,

The Headswoman

it is not so. My own interests do not weigh with me for a moment. It is on your account, Jeanne, and yours alone, that I ask you to consider whether the higher æsthetic qualities, which I know you possess, may not become cramped and thwarted by 'the trivial round, the common task,' which you have lightly undertaken. However laudable a professional life may be, one always feels that with a delicate organism such as woman, some of the bloom may possibly get rubbed off the peach."

"Well, Enguerrand," said Jeanne, composing herself with an effort, though her lips were set hard, "I will do you the justice to believe that personal advantage does not influence you, and I will try to reason calmly with you, and convince you that you are simply hide-bound by old-world prejudice. Now, take yourself, for instance, who come here to instruct me:

The Headswoman

what does *your* profession amount to, when all's said and done? A mass of lies, quibbles, dodges, and tricks, that would make any self-respecting executioner blush! And even with the dirty weapons at your command, you make but a poor show of it. There was that wretched fellow you defended only two days ago. (I was in court during the trial — professional interest, you know.) Well, he had his regular *alibi* all ready, as clear as clear could be; only you must needs go and mess and bungle the thing up, so that, just as I expected all along, he was passed on to me for treatment in due course. You may like to have his opinion — that of a shrewd, though unlettered person. 'It's a real pleasure, miss,' he said, 'to be handled by you. You *knows* your work, and you *does* your work — though p'raps I ses it as should n't. If that blooming fool of a mouthpiece of mine' — he was referring to

The Headswoman

you, dear, in your capacity of advocate — ‘had known his business half as well as you do yours, I should n’t a bin here now!’ And you know, Enguerrand, he was perfectly right.”

“Well, perhaps he was,” admitted Enguerrand. “You see, I had been working at a sonnet the night before, and I could n’t get the rhymes right, and they would keep coming into my head in court and mixing themselves up with the *alibi*. But look here, Jeanne, when you saw I was going off the track, you might have given me a friendly hint, you know — for old times’ sake, if not for the prisoner’s!”

“I daresay,” replied Jeanne, calmly: “perhaps you’ll tell me why I should sacrifice my interests because you’re unable to look after yours. You forget that I receive a bonus, over and above my salary, upon each exercise of my functions!”

“True,” said Enguerrand, gloomily: “I

The Headswoman

did forget that. I wish I had your business aptitudes, Jeanne."

"I daresay you do," remarked Jeanne. "But you see, dear, how all your arguments fall to the ground. You mistake a prepossession for a logical base. Now if I had gone, like that Clairette you used to dangle after, and been waiting-woman to some grand lady in a château, — a thin-blooded compound of drudge and sycophant, — then, I suppose, you'd have been perfectly satisfied. So feminine! So genteel!"

"She's not a bad sort of girl, little Claire," said Enguerrand, reflectively (thereby angering Jeanne afresh): "but putting her aside, — of course you could always beat me at argument, Jeanne; you'd have made a much better lawyer than I. But you know, dear, how much I care about you; and I did hope that on that account even a prejudice, however unreasonable, might

The Headswoman

have some little weight. And I'm not alone, let me tell you, in my views. There was a fellow in court only to-day, who was saying that yours was only a *succès d'estime*, and that woman, as a naturally talkative and hopelessly unpunctual animal, could never be more than a clever amateur in the profession you have chosen."

"That will do, Enguerrand," said Jeanne, proudly; "it seems that when argument fails, you can stoop so low as to insult me through my sex. You men are all alike, — steeped in brutish masculine prejudice. Now go away, and don't mention the subject to me again till you're quite reasonable and nice."

The Headswoman

III

JEANNE passed a somewhat restless night after her small scene with her cousin, waking depressed and unrefreshed. Though she had carried matters with so high a hand, and had scored so distinctly all around, she had been more agitated than she had cared to show. She liked Enguerrand; and more especially did she like his admiration for her; and that chance allusion to Clairette contained possibilities that were alarming. In embracing a professional career, she had never thought for a moment that it could militate against that due share of admiration to which, as a girl, she was justly entitled; and Enguerrand's views seemed this morning all the

The Headswoman

more narrow and inexcusable. She rose languidly, and as soon as she was dressed sent off a little note to the Mayor, saying that she had a nervous headache and felt out of sorts, and begging to be excused from attendance on that day; and the missive reached the Mayor just as he was taking his usual place at the head of the Board.

“Dear, dear!” said the kind-hearted old man, as soon as he had read the letter to his fellow-councilmen: “I’m very sorry. Poor girl! Here, one of you fellows, just run round and tell the gaoler there won’t be any business to-day. Jeanne’s seedy. It’s put off till to-morrow. And now, gentlemen, the agenda ——”

“Really, your worship,” exploded Robinet, “this is simply ridiculous!”

“Upon my word, Robinet,” said the Mayor, “I don’t know what’s the matter with you. Here’s a poor girl unwell, —

The Headswoman

and a more hardworking girl is n't in the town, — and instead of sympathising with her, and saying you're sorry, you call it ridiculous! Suppose you had a headache yourself! You would n't like —— ”

“ But it *is* ridiculous,” maintained the tanner, stoutly. “ Who ever heard of an executioner having a nervous headache? There's no precedent for it. And ‘out of sorts,’ too! Suppose the criminals said they were out of sorts, and did n't feel up to being executed?”

“ Well, suppose they did,” replied the Mayor, “ we'd try and meet them halfway, I daresay. They'd have to be executed some time or other, you know. Why on earth are you so captious about trifles? The prisoners won't mind, and *I* don't mind: nobody's inconvenienced, and everybody's happy!”

“ You're right there, Mr. Mayor,” put in another councilman. “ This executing

The Headswoman

business used to give the town a lot of trouble and bother; now it's all as easy as kiss-your-hand. Instead of objecting, as they used to do, and wanting to argue the point and kick up a row, the fellows as is told off for execution come skipping along in the morning, like a lot of lambs in Maytime. And then the fun there is on the scaffold! The jokes, the back-answers, the repartees! And never a word to shock a baby! Why, my little girl, as goes through the market-place every morning — on her way to school, you know — she says to me only yesterday, she says, 'Why, father,' she says, 'it's as good as the play-actors,' she says."

"There again," persisted Robinet, "I object to that too. They ought to show a properer feeling. Playing at mummers is one thing, and being executed is another, and people ought to keep 'em separate. In my father's time, that sort of thing was n't

The Headswoman

thought good taste, and I don't hold with new-fangled notions."

"Well, really, neighbour," said the Mayor, "I think you're out of sorts yourself to-day. You must have got out of bed the wrong side this morning. As for a little joke, more or less, we all know a maiden loves a merry jest when she's certain of having the last word! But I'll tell you what I'll do, if it'll please you; I'll go round and see Jeanne myself on my way home, and tell her—quite nicely, you know—that once in a way does n't matter, but that if she feels her health won't let her keep regular business hours, she mustn't think of going on with anything that's bad for her. Like that, don't you see? And now, gentlemen, let's read the minutes!"

Thus it came about that Jeanne took her usual walk that evening with a ruffled brow and a swelling heart; and her little hand

The Headswoman

opened and shut angrily as she paced the ramparts. She could n't stand being found fault with. How could she help having a headache? Those clods of citizens did n't know what a highly strung sensitive organisation was. Absorbed in her reflections, she had taken several turns up and down the grassy footway before she became aware that she was not alone. A youth, of richer dress and more elegant bearing than the general run of the Rade-gundians, was leaning in an embrasure, watching the graceful figure with evident interest.

"Something has vexed you, fair maiden?" he observed, coming forward deferentially as soon as he perceived he was noticed; "and care sits but awkwardly on that smooth young brow."

"Nay, it is nothing, kind sir," replied Jeanne; "we girls who work for our living must not be too sensitive. My em-

The Headswoman

ployers have been somewhat exigent, that is all. I did wrong to take it to heart."

"'Tis the way of the bloated capitalist," rejoined the young man, lightly, as he turned to walk by her side. "They grind us, they grind us; perhaps some day they will come under your hands in turn, and then you can pay them out. And so you toil and spin, fair lily! And yet methinks those delicate hands show little trace of labour?"

"You wrong me, indeed, sir," replied Jeanne, merrily. "These hands of mine, that you are so good as to admire, do great execution!"

"I can well believe that your victims are numerous," he replied; "may I be permitted to rank myself among the latest of them?"

"I wish you a better fortune, kind sir," answered Jeanne, demurely.

The Headswoman

“I can imagine no more delightful one,” he replied; “and where do you ply your daily task, fair mistress? Not entirely out of sight and access, I trust?”

“Nay, sir,” laughed Jeanne, “I work in the market-place most mornings, and there is no charge for admission; and access is far from difficult. Indeed, some complain—but that is no business of mine. And now I must be wishing you a good-evening. Nay,”—for he would have detained her,—“it is not seemly for an unprotected maiden to tarry in converse with a stranger at this hour. *Au revoir*, sir! If you should happen to be in the market-place any morning——” And she tripped lightly away. The youth, gazing after her retreating figure, confessed himself strangely fascinated by this fair unknown, whose particular employment, by the way, he had forgotten to ask; while Jeanne, as she sped homewards, could not help re-

The Headswoman

flecting that, for style and distinction, this new acquaintance threw into the shade all the Enguerrands and others she had met hitherto — even in the course of business.

The Headswoman

IV

THE next morning was bright and breezy, and Jeanne was early at her post, feeling quite a different girl. The busy little market-place was full of colour and movement, and the gay patches of flowers and fruit, the strings of fluttering kerchiefs, and the piles of red and yellow pottery, formed an artistic setting to the quiet impressive scaffold which they framed. Jeanne was in short sleeves, according to the etiquette of her office, and her round graceful arms showed snowily against her dark blue skirt and scarlet tight-fitting bodice. Her assistant looked at her with admiration.

“Hope you’re better, miss,” he said respectfully. “It was just as well you

The Headswoman

did n't put yourself out to come yesterday ; there was nothing particular to do. Only one fellow, and he said *he* did n't care ; anything to oblige a lady ! ”

“ Well, I wish he 'd hurry up now, to oblige a lady,” said Jeanne, swinging her axe carelessly to and fro : “ ten minutes past the hour ; I shall have to talk to the Mayor about this.”

“ It 's a pity there ain't a better show this morning,” pursued the assistant, as he leant over the rail of the scaffold and spat meditatively into the busy throng below. “ They do say as how the young Seigneur arrived at the Château yesterday— him as has been finishing his education in Paris, you know. He 's as likely as not to be in the market-place to-day ; and if he 's disappointed, he may go off to Paris again, which would be a pity, seeing the Château 's been empty so long. But he may go to Paris, or anywheres else he 's a mind to, he

The Headswoman

won't see better workmanship than in this here little town ! ”

“ Well, my good Raoul,” said Jeanne, colouring slightly at the obvious compliment, “ quality, not quantity, is what we aim at here, you know. If a Paris education has been properly assimilated by the Seigneur, he will not fail to make all the necessary allowances. But see, the prison-doors are opening at last ! ”

They both looked across the little square to the prison, which fronted the scaffold ; and sure enough, a small body of men, the Sheriff at their head, was issuing from the building, conveying, or endeavouring to convey, the tardy prisoner to the scaffold. That gentleman, however, seemed to be in a different and less obliging frame of mind from that of the previous day ; and at every pace one or other of the guards was shot violently into the middle of the square, propelled by a vigorous kick or blow from

The Headswoman

the struggling captive. The crowd, unaccustomed of late to such demonstrations of feeling, and resenting the prisoner's want of taste, hooted loudly; but it was not until that ingenious mediæval arrangement known as *la marche aux crapauds* had been brought to bear on him that the reluctant convict could be prevailed upon to present himself before the young lady he had already so unwarrantably detained.

Jeanne's profession had both accustomed her to surprises and taught her the futility of considering her clients as drawn from any one particular class; yet she could hardly help feeling some astonishment on recognising her new acquaintance of the previous evening. That, with all his evident amiability of character, he should come to this end, was not in itself a special subject for wonder; but that he should have been conversing with her on the ramparts at the hour when — after courteously

The Headswoman

excusing her attendance on the scaffold — he was cooling his heels in prison for another day, seemed hardly to be accounted for, at first sight. Jeanne, however, reflected that the reconciling of apparent contradictions was not included in her official duties.

The Sheriff, wiping his heated brow, now read the formal *procès* delivering over the prisoner to the executioner's hands; "and a nice job we've had to get him here," he added on his own account. And the young man, who had remained perfectly tractable since his arrival, stepped forward and bowed politely.

"Now that we have been properly introduced," said he, courtcously, "allow me to apologise for any inconvenience you have been put to by my delay. The fault was entirely mine, and these gentlemen are in no way to blame. Had I known whom I was to have the pleasure of meet-

The Headswoman

ing, wings could not have conveyed me swiftly enough."

"Do not mention, I pray, the word inconvenience," replied Jeanne, with that timid grace which so well became her. "I only trust that any slight discomfort it may be my duty to cause you before we part will be as easily pardoned. And now — for the morning, alas! advances — any little advice or assistance that I can offer is quite at your service; for the situation is possibly new, and you may have had but little experience."

"Faith, none worth mentioning," said the prisoner, gaily. "Treat me as a raw beginner. Though our acquaintance has been but brief, I have the utmost confidence in you."

"Then, sir," said Jeanne, blushing, "suppose I were to assist you in removing this gay doublet, so as to give both of us more freedom and less responsibility?"

The Headswoman

"A perquisite of the office?" queried the prisoner with a smile, as he slipped one arm out of its sleeve.

A flush came over Jeanne's fair brow. "That was ungenerous," she said.

"Nay, pardon me, sweet one," said he, laughing: "'t was but a poor jest of mine — in bad taste, I willingly admit."

"I was sure you did not mean to hurt me," she replied kindly, while her fingers were busy in turning back the collar of his shirt. It was composed, she noticed, of the finest point lace; and she could not help a feeling of regret that some slight error — as must, from what she knew, exist somewhere — should compel her to take a course so at variance with her real feelings. Her only comfort was that the youth himself seemed entirely satisfied with his situation. He hummed the last air from Paris during her ministrations, and when she had quite finished, kissed

The Headswoman

the pretty fingers with a metropolitan grace.

“And now, sir,” said Jeanne, “if you will kindly come this way: and please to mind the step — so. Now, if you will have the goodness to kneel here — nay, the sawdust is perfectly clean; you are my first client this morning. On the other side of the block you will find a nick, more or less adapted to the human chin, though a perfect fit cannot of course be guaranteed in every case. So! Are you pretty comfortable?”

“A bed of roses,” replied the prisoner. “And what a really admirable view one gets of the valley and the river, from just this particular point!”

“Charming, is it not?” replied Jeanne. “I’m so glad you do justice to it. Some of your predecessors have really quite vexed me by their inability to appreciate that view. It’s worth coming here

The Headswoman

to see it. And now, to return to business for one moment, — would you prefer to give the word yourself? Some people do; it's a mere matter of taste. Or will you leave yourself entirely in my hands?"

"Oh, in your fair hands," replied her client, "which I beg you to consider respectfully kissed once more by your faithful servant to command."

Jeanne, blushing rosily, stepped back a pace, moistening her palms as she grasped her axe, when a puffing and blowing behind caused her to turn her head, and she perceived the Mayor hastily ascending the scaffold.

"Hold on a minute, Jeanne, my girl," he gasped. "Don't be in a hurry. There's been some little mistake."

Jeanne drew herself up with dignity. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand you, Mr. Mayor," she replied in freezing ac-

The Headswoman

cents. "There's been no little mistake on my part that I'm aware of."

"No, no, no," said the Mayor, apologetically; "but on somebody else's there has. You see it happened in this way: this here young fellow was going round the town last night; and he'd been dining, I should say, and he was carrying on rather free. I will only say so much in your presence, that he was carrying on decidedly free. So the town-guard happened to come across him, and he was very high and very haughty, he was, and wouldn't give his name nor yet his address — as a gentleman should, you know, when he's been dining and carrying on free. So our fellows just ran him in — and it took the pick of them all their time to do it, too. Well, then, the other chap who was in prison — the gentleman who obliged you yesterday, you know — what does he do but slip out and run away in the middle of all the row and

The Headswoman

confusion; and very inconsiderate and ungentlemanly it was of him to take advantage of us in that mean way, just when we wanted a little sympathy and forbearance. Well, the Sheriff comes this morning to fetch out his man for execution, and he knows there's only one man to execute, and he sees there's only one man in prison, and it all seems as simple as A B C — he never was much of a mathematician, you know — so he fetches our friend here along, quite gaily. And — and that's how it came about, you see; *hinc illæ lachrymæ*, as the Roman poet has it. So now I shall just give this young fellow a good talking to, and discharge him with a caution; and we sha'n't require you any more to-day, Jeanne, my girl."

"Now, look here, Mr. Mayor," said Jeanne, severely, "you utterly fail to grasp the situation in its true light. All these little details may be interesting in them-

The Headswoman

selves, and doubtless the press will take note of them; but they are entirely beside the point. With the muddleheadedness of your officials (which I have frequently remarked upon) I have nothing whatever to do. All I know is, that this young gentleman has been formally handed over to me for execution, with all the necessary legal requirements; and executed he has got to be. When my duty has been performed, you are at liberty to reopen the case if you like; and any 'little mistake' that may have occurred through your stupidity you can then rectify at your leisure. Meantime, you've no *locus standi* here at all; in fact, you've no business whatever lumbering up my scaffold. So shut up and clear out."

"Now, Jeanne, do be reasonable," implored the Mayor. "You women are so precise. You never will make any allowance for the necessary margin of error in things."

The Headswoman

“If I were to allow the necessary margin for all *your* errors, Mayor,” replied Jeanne, coolly, “the edition would have to be a large-paper one, and even then the text would stand a poor chance. And now, if you don’t allow me the necessary margin to swing my axe, there may be another ‘little mistake’ ——”

But at this point a hubbub arose at the foot of the scaffold, and Jeanne, leaning over, perceived sundry tall fellows, clad in the livery of the Seigneur, engaged in dispersing the municipal guard by the agency of well-directed kicks, applied with heartiness and anatomical knowledge. A moment later, there strode on to the scaffold, clad in black velvet, and adorned with his gold chain of office, the stately old seneschal of the Château, evidently in a towering passion.

“Now, mark my words, you miserable little bladder-o’-lard,” he roared at the

The Headswoman

Mayor (whose bald head certainly shone provokingly in the morning sun), "see if I don't take this out of your skin presently!" And he passed on to where the youth was still kneeling, apparently quite absorbed in the view.

"My lord," he said firmly though respectfully, "your hair-brained folly really passes all bounds. Have you entirely lost your head?"

"Faith, nearly," said the young man, rising and stretching himself. "Is that you, old Thibault? Ow, what a crick I've got in my neck! But that view of the valley was really delightful!"

"Did you come here simply to admire the view, my lord?" inquired Thibault, severely.

"I came because my horse would come," replied the young Seigneur, lightly: "that is, these gentlemen here were so pressing; they would not hear of any refusal; and

The Headswoman

besides, they forgot to mention what my attendance was required in such a hurry for. And when I got here, Thibault, old fellow, and saw that divine creature — nay, a goddess, *dea certé* — so graceful, so modest, so anxious to acquit herself with credit — Well, you know my weakness; I never could bear to disappoint a woman. She had evidently set her heart on taking my head; and as she had my heart already — ”

“ I think, my lord,” said Thibault, with some severity, “ you had better let me escort you back to the Château. This appears to be hardly a safe place for light-headed and susceptible persons ! ”

Jeanne, as was natural, had the last word. “ Understand me, Mr. Mayor,” said she, “ these proceedings are entirely irregular. I decline to recognise them, and when the quarter expires I shall claim the usual bonus ! ”

The Headswoman

V

WHEN, an hour or two later, an invitation arrived — courteously worded but significantly backed by an escort of half-a-dozen tall archers — for both Jeanne and the Mayor to attend at the Château without delay, Jeanne for her part received it with neither surprise nor reluctance. She had felt it especially hard that the only two interviews fate had granted her with the one man who had made some impression on her heart should be hampered, the one by considerations of propriety, the other by the conflicting claims of her profession and its duties. On this occasion, now, she would have an excellent chaperon in the Mayor; and, business being over for the day, they could

The Headswoman

meet and unbend on a common social footing. The Mayor was not at all surprised either, considering what had gone before; but he was exceedingly terrified, and sought some consolation from Jeanne as they proceeded together to the Château. That young lady's remarks, however, could hardly be called exactly comforting.

"I always thought you'd put your foot in it some day, Mayor," she said. "You are so hopelessly wanting in system and method. Really, under the present happy-go-lucky police arrangements, I never know whom I may not be called upon to execute. Between you and my cousin Enguerrand, life is hardly safe in this town. And the worst of it is, that we other officials on the staff have to share in the discredit."

"What do you think they'll do to me, Jeanne?" whimpered the Mayor, perspiring freely.

The Headswoman

“Can’t say, I’m sure,” pursued the candid Jeanne. “Of course, if it’s anything in the *rack* line of business, I shall have to superintend the arrangements, and then you can feel sure you’re in capable hands. But probably they’ll only fine you pretty smartly, give you a month or two in the dungeons, and dismiss you from your post; and you will hardly grudge any slight personal inconvenience resulting from an arrangement so much to the advantage of the town.”

This was hardly reassuring, but the Mayor’s official reprimand of the previous day still rankled in this unforgiving young person’s mind.

On their reaching the Château the Mayor was conducted aside, to be dealt with by Thibault; and from the sounds of agonised protestation and lament which shortly reached Jeanne’s ears, it was evident that he was having a *mauvais quart*

The Headswoman

d'heure. The young lady was shown respectfully into a chamber apart, where she had hardly had time to admire sufficiently the good taste of the furniture and the magnificence of the tapestry with which the walls were hung, when the Seigneur entered and welcomed her with a cordial grace that put her entirely at her ease.

“Your punctuality puts me to shame, fair mistress,” he said, “considering how unwarrantably I kept you waiting this morning, and how I tested your patience by my ignorance and awkwardness.”

He had changed his dress, and the lace round his neck was even richer than before. Jeanne had always considered one of the chief marks of a well-bred man to be a fine disregard for the amount of his washing-bill; and then with what good taste he referred to recent events — putting himself in the wrong, as a gentleman should!

The Headswoman

"Indeed, my lord," she replied modestly, "I was only too anxious to hear from your own lips that you bore me no ill-will for the part forced on me by circumstances in our recent interview. Your lordship has sufficient critical good sense, I feel sure, to distinguish between the woman and the official."

"True, Jeanne," he replied, drawing nearer; "and while I shrink from expressing, in their fulness, all the feelings that the woman inspires in me, I have no hesitation — for I know it will give you pleasure — in acquainting you with the entire artistic satisfaction with which I watched you at your task!"

"But, indeed," said Jeanne, "you did not see me at my best. In fact, I can't help wishing — it's ridiculous, I know, because the thing is hardly practicable — but if I could only have carried my performance quite through, and put the last fin-

The Headswoman

ishing touches to it, you would not have been judging me now by the mere 'block-in' of what promised to be a masterpiece!"

"Yes, I wish it could have been arranged somehow," said the Seigneur, reflectively; "but perhaps it's better as it is. I am content to let the artist remain for the present on trust, if I may only take over, fully paid up, the woman I adore!"

Jeanne felt strangely weak. The official seemed oozing out at her fingers and toes, while the woman's heart beat even more distressingly.

"I have one little question to ask," he murmured (his arm was about her now). "Do I understand that you still claim your bonus?"

Jeanne felt like water in his strong embrace; but she nerved herself to answer faintly but firmly, "Yes!"

The Headswoman

“Then so do I,” he replied, as his lips met hers.

.

Executions continued to occur in St. Radegonde; the Radegundians being conservative and very human. But much of the innocent enjoyment that formerly attended them departed after the fair Chate-laine had ceased to officiate. Enguerrand, on succeeding to the post, wedded Clairette, she being (he was heard to say) a more suitable match in mind and temper than others of whom he would name no names. Rumour had it, that he found his match and something over; while as for temper — and mind (which she gave him in bits) — But the domestic trials of high-placed officials have a right to be held sacred. The profession, in spite of his best endeavours, languished nevertheless. Some said that the scaffold lacked its old attraction for criminals of spirit; others, more unkindly,

The Headswoman

that the headsman was the innocent cause, and that Enguerrand was less fatal in his new sphere than formerly, when practising in the criminal court as advocate for the defence.

Here ends the Tale of The Headswoman, by
Kenneth Grahame. Printed for John
Lane, by the University Press, Cambridge,
U. S. A., in April, m dccc xcvi



Stories Toto Told Me

Stories Toto Told Me

BY

BARON CORVO



JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD

LONDON AND NEW YORK

1898

COPYRIGHT, 1898
BY JOHN LANE

University Press, Cambridge, U. S. A.

Contents.

	PAGE
I. ABOUT SAN PIETRO AND SAN PAOLO	7
II. ABOUT THE LILIES OF SAN LUIGI .	18
III. A CAPRICE OF THE CHERUBIM . .	40
IV. ABOUT BEATA BEATRICE AND THE MAMMA OF SAN PIETRO	55
V. ABOUT THE HERESY OF FRA SERAFICO	75
VI. ABOUT ONE WAY IN WHICH CHRIS- TIAN LOVE ONE ANOTHER . . .	102

Stories Toto Told Me



I

ABOUT SAN PIETRO AND SAN PAOLO.

ONCE upon a time, sir, the people in Rome were building two churches; the one for San Pietro on the Monte Vaticano, and the other for San Paolo outside the walls of the city. The two saints used to spend all their spare time sitting on one of the balconies of heaven, and watching the builders; for they were both very anxious about their churches. San Pietro desired to have his church finished before that of San Paolo; and so, every night after it was dark outside, he used to leave the keys of heaven in the porch, and ask his brother, Sant' Andrea, to give an eye to the gate while he went

Stories Toto Told Me

round the corner for a minute or two. Then he would slip down to the church of San Paolo, and take to pieces the work which the builders had done during the day; and if there were any carvings, or pillars, or things of that sort which took his fancy, he would carry them away and build them into his own church, patching up the part he had taken them from so well that no one could tell the difference. And so, while the builders of the church of San Pietro made a progress which was wonderful, the builders of the church of San Paolo did not make any progress at all.

This went on for a long while, and San Paolo became more uneasy in his mind every day, and he could not take his food, and nothing gave him any pleasure. Santa Cecilia tried to amuse him with some new songs she had made; but this made him quite angry, for he said that a woman ought to learn in silence with subjection.

About San Pietro and San Paolo

One day, while he was leaning over the balcony, he saw two pillars taken into his church, which were of yellow antique, most rare and precious, and had been sent from some foreign country (I do not know its name). He was altogether delighted; and he went down to the gate and asked San Pietro to be so kind as to tell him whether he had ever seen finer pillars. But San Pietro only said they were rather pretty, and then he asked San Paolo to get out of the way and let him shut the gate, in case some improper souls should sneak in.

That night, sir, when it was dark, San Pietro went and robbed those two pillars of yellow antique, and set them up in his own church. But in the morning, San Paolo, who had thought of nothing but his new pillars all through the night, said a black mass because it was shorter, and then went on to the balcony to have the pleasure of looking at his church with its beautiful

Stories Toto Told Me

pillars of yellow antique. And when he saw that they were not there he became disturbed in his mind, and he went and sat down in a shady place to consider what he should do next. After much thought, it appeared to him that he had been robbed, and as he knew that a person who has once committed a theft will continue to steal as long as he remains free, he resolved to watch his church at night, that he might discover who had stolen his pillars.

During the day the builders of the church of San Paolo put up two fresh pillars of yellow antique, and two of porphyry, and two of green antique as well. San Paolo gloated over these fine things from his seat on the balcony, for he knew them to be so beautiful that they would tempt the thief to make another raid, and then he would catch him.

After the Ave Maria, he made friends with one of the angels, who was putting on

About San Pietro and San Paolo

his armour in the guard-room before taking his place in the line of sentries who encircle the city of God both by day and night. These angels, sir, are a hundred cubits high, and San Paolo asked one of them, whose post was near the gate, to hide him under his wings so that he could watch for the robber without being seen. The angel said that he was most happy to oblige; for San Paolo was a Roman of Rome, and very well thought of in heaven; and when the night came on San Paolo hid in the shadow of his feathers.

Presently he saw San Pietro go out of the gate, and the light, of which the bodies of the saints are made, went with him, so that, though the earth was in darkness, San Paolo could see plainly all that he did. And he picked up the two fresh pillars of yellow antique, and the two of red porphyry, and also the two of green antique in his hand, just as you, sir, would pick up six paint-

Stories Toto Told Me

brushes; and he carried them to his own church on the Monte Vaticano and set them up there. And when he had patched up the place from which he had taken the pillars so that they could not be missed, he came back into heaven.

San Paolo met him at the gate and accused him of thieving, but San Pietro answered blusteringly that he was the Prince of the Apostles, and that he had a right to all the best pillars for his church. San Paolo replied that, once before, he had had occasion to withstand San Pietro to the face because he was to be blamed (and that was at Antioch, sir); and then high words arose, and the two saints quarrelled so loudly that the Padre Eterno, sitting on His great white throne, sent San Michele Arcangiolo to bring the disputants into His Presence.

Then San Paolo said :

“O Re dei secoli, immortale et invisibile,

About San Pietro and San Paolo

— The citizens of Rome are building two churches, the one for me and the other for San Pietro ; and for some time I have noticed that while the builders of my church do not seem to make any progress with their work, the church of San Pietro is nearly finished. The day before yesterday (and to-day is Saturday), two pillars of yellow antique were set up in my church, most beautiful pillars, O Signor Iddio, but somebody stole them away during the night. And yesterday six pillars were set up, two of yellow antique, two of green antique, and two of porphyry. To-night I watched to see if they would be stolen ; and I have seen San Pietro go down and take them to his own church on the Monte Vaticano.”

Then the Padre Eterno turned to San Pietro and asked if he had anything to say.

And San Pietro answered :

“ O Re del Cielo, — I have long ago

Stories Toto Told Me

learnt the lesson that it is not well to deny that which La Sua Divina Maesta knows to be true; and I acknowledge that I have taken the pillars, and many other things too, from the church of San Paolo, and have set them up in my own. Nevertheless, I desire to represent that there is no question of robbery here. O Dio Omnipotente, You have deigned to make me the Prince of the Apostolic College, the Keeper of the Keys of Heaven, and the Head of Your Church on earth, and it is not fitting that the churches which men build in my honour should be less magnificent than those which they build for San Paolo. Therefore, in taking these pillars that San Paolo makes such a paltry fuss about, I am simply within my right—a right which belongs to the dignity of the rank which lo Splendore Immortale della Sua Maesta has been graciously pleased to confer upon me.”

About San Pietro and San Paolo

But this defence did not content the Padre Eterno. He said that the secret method in which San Pietro worked was a proof that he knew he was doing what he ought not to do; and further, that it was not fair to the men who were building the church of San Paolo to take away the fine things for which they spent their money for the honour of San Paolo. So He cautioned San Pietro not to allow it to occur again.

On the next day there was a festa and the builders did not work; but on the Monday they placed in the church of San Paolo several slabs of lapis lazuli and malachite; and during the night San Pietro, who was the most bold and daring of men, had the hardihood to take them away and put them in his own church, right before the very eyes of San Paolo, who stood at the gate watching him. By the time he returned, San Paolo had made a complaint

Stories Toto Told Me

before the Padre Eterno; and San Pietro was most severely spoken to, and warned that, if he persisted in his disobedience, not even his exalted rank, and general usefulness, and good conduct would save him from punishment.

The following day, which was Tuesday, a marvellous baldachino of jasper and violet marble, being a gift from the Grand Turk, was put up in the church of San Paolo; and at night San Pietro went down as usual and robbed it. For the third time San Paolo complained to the Padre Eterno, and then all the Court of Heaven was summoned into the Presence to hear judgment pronounced.

The Padre Eterno said — and His Voice, sir, was like rolling thunder — that as San Pietro had been guilty of disobedience to the Divine Decree, in that, urged on by vanity, he had taken the property of San Paolo for his own church on the Monte

About San Pietro and San Paolo

Vaticano; and by so doing had prevented the church of San Paolo from being finished; it was an Order that, until the end of time, the great church of San Pietro in Rome should never be completed. Also, the Padre Eterno added that, as He would give no encouragement to sneaks and tell-tale-tits, the church of San Paolo outside the walls, though finished, should be subjected to destruction and demolition, and, as often as it was rebuilt, so often should it be destroyed.

And you know, sir, that the church of San Paolo is always being burnt down or blown up, and that the church of San Pietro has never left the builders' hands.

II

ABOUT THE LILIES OF SAN LUIGI

YOU know, sir, that San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio were always very friendly together. While they lived in this world, they used to get into mischief in each other's company; for they were extremely fond of playing tricks upon the pagans who were putting the Christians to death.

Then, when their turn came, they gladly suffered martyrdom; and San Pancrazio was killed by a wild beast in the Colosseum in Rome, while San Sebastiano was shot as full of arrows as a hedgehog is of prickles; and when that did not kill him he was beaten with a club until he died. And then they both went to live in heaven for ever and the day after.

About the Lilies of San Luigi

Now, I must tell you what they look like, so that you may know them when you see them. First of all, you must understand that the saints in heaven are always young; that is to say, if you are old when your life in this world comes to its end, you just shut your eyes while your angel takes you to paradise, and when you open them the next minute you are there, and you have gone back to the prime of your life, and so you are for always; but if you die while you are young you do not change your age, but remain at the age at which you died. That is, if you die a saint, or a martyr, which is better, — and, of course, you can always do that if you like. And even supposing it is good for you to have a little purgatory first, if you have kept good friends with the Madonna, she will go and take you out the Saturday after you have died, and then you can go to heaven.

Stories Toto Told Me

And your body, too, is changed, so that you cannot have any more pains or illnesses. Oh, yes, it is made of flesh, just the same to look at as this; but instead of the flesh being made of the dust of the earth, it is made of the Fire of God, and that is why wherever the saints go they are all bright like the stars.

Ah, well! San Sebastiano was eighteen years old when he went to heaven, and so he is always eighteen years old; and San Pancrazio was fourteen, and so he is always fourteen; and they are quite as cheerful and daring and mischievous as they were in this world; so that when a joke has been played upon any of the saints, they always say, "By Bacchus! there are those boys again."

There are, of course, very many boys in heaven, but now I am only telling you of these two — San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio, and the third, whose name is San

About the Lilies of San Luigi

Luigi; and the angel of San Sebastiano, who is called Sebastianello.

You must know that San Luigi was altogether different to San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio. Of course, he had not been a martyr like them, though he is a very great saint indeed, and I suppose it is because he has only been in heaven a little while, and is new to the place, that his manners are so stiff. He always goes about with his eyes on the ground, you know, and there is not a bit of fun in him. You see, he was a Jesuit; and there were no such things in the world for hundreds of years after San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio had been saints in heaven. When he first came, San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio thought there was another boy like themselves to join in their games; and they were quite eager to make his acquaintance, and to give him a welcome. So the moment the choir struck up the

Stories Toto Told Me

"Iste Confessor," they rushed down to the gate to offer him their friendship. San Luigi came slowly through the archway, dressed in a cassock and surplice, and carrying a lily in his hand, and his eyes were fixed upon the ground; but when San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio, with their arms locked together, said how pleased they were to see him, he looked up at them shyly and said, "Many thanks," and then the appearance of San Sebastiano so shocked him that he blushed deeply and veiled his eyes again, and after that he kept out of their way as much as possible.

You see, sir, San Sebastiano was quite naked: indeed he had nothing about him but his halo and an arrow; for, when the pagans made a target of him, they stripped off all his clothes, and so he came to heaven like that. You can see his picture in the Duomo whenever

About the Lilies of San Luigi

you choose, if you do not believe me. But he was so beautiful and muscular, and straight and strong, and his flesh so white and fine, and his hair like shining gold, that no one had ever thought of him as naked before. San Luigi, however, found him perfectly dreadful; and pretended to shiver whenever he met him, which was not very often, because San Luigi spent most of his time in the chapel saying office.

San Sebastiano did consider him a little rude, perhaps, and, of course, San Pancrazio agreed with his friend; and though they were quite good-natured and unwilling to make any unpleasantness, still they could not help feeling hurt when this newcomer — and that was the worst name they ever called him — turned up his nose because their minds and their manners were more gay and free than his.

One very hot afternoon in summer the

Stories Toto Told Me

two saints went to practise their diving in a delicious pool of cool water under a waterfall; and when they were tired of that, they lay down on the bank and dangled their legs in the stream, while the sun was drying their haloes.

Presently San Luigi came creeping along with an old surplice in his hand, and he went up to San Sebastiano and offered it to him, holding his lily up before his face all the time he was speaking. San Sebastiano did not move, but lay there on the green grass, looking at San Luigi with his merry laughing eyes, and saying not a word; and San Pancrazio did the same. San Luigi repeated his offer from behind his lily, and implored San Sebastiano to put on the surplice, — just to cover up his poor legs, he said. San Sebastiano replied that he did not think there was anything amiss with his legs, which were good enough, as far as he could see, because

About the Lilies of San Luigi

the Padre Eterno had made them like that, and He always did all things well. Then San Luigi offered the surplice to San Pancrazio, who was also naked, because he had been bathing; but he laughed as he answered, with many thanks, that he had some very good clothes of his own, which he would put on when his body was dry; and he pointed out his beautiful tunic of white wool with a broad purple stripe down the front, and his golden bulla, and his sandals of red leather, with the pearl crescent on the toes, for he was noble, sir, and also a Roman of Rome. San Luigi said that the tunic was rather short but it was better than nothing; and then he turned to San Sebastiano and again entreated him to put on the surplice.

Presently San Sebastiano stretched out his splendid arm from the long grass

Stories Toto Told Me

where he lay, and grabbed the surplice so suddenly that San Luigi dropped down on his knees, and his lily became disarranged; and while he was picking himself up San Sebastiano rolled the surplice into a ball and tossed it over to San Pancrazio, who threw it back to him; and the two saints played ball with it quite merrily for some minutes, and all the time San Luigi was protesting that he had not brought it out for that purpose, and beseeching them not to be so frivolous. But the game amused them to such an extent that they were now running to and fro upon the bank, and taking long shots at each other. San Sebastiano had just made a particularly clever catch, but in returning the ball he over-balanced himself and tumbled splash, heels over head, into the pool. This had a bad effect on his aim, and instead of the ball going in the direction he intended — that is to say, towards San Pancrazio —

About the Lilies of San Luigi

it flew straight in San Luigi's face. He was still holding up his lily for a screen, and consequently it was crushed and broken, and all the blooms destroyed; and he seemed so grieved at this that the two friends — for San Sebastiano immediately swam to the side and climbed out of the pool — tried to console him by telling him that they would get him another in two winks of an eye.

But San Luigi said that was no good, because he always got his lilies off his altars down in the world, and no others would suit him; and there were none there now, because it was not his festa till to-morrow, and nobody would offer him any lilies till then.

When they heard this, San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio burst into roars of laughter, and they made such a noise that the Padre Eterno, Who was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, sent

Stories Toto Told Me

one of the cherubini from the Aureola to know what it was all about.

San Pancrazio jumped into his tunic and put his bulla round his neck, while San Sebastiano laced his sandals for him; and then the two friends stood at "Attention!" as the Suprema Maesta e Grandezza came under the trees towards them. Of course you know, sir, that San Sebastiano was in the imperial body-guard when he lived in the world, and he had taught San Pancrazio all the drill.

Then San Sebastiano looked boldly upon the Face of God, and said:

"O Signor Iddio Altissimo, we were laughing at Luigi because he will not have the lilies of Paradise, and prefers the nasty things they put upon his altars in the world."

San Luigi got quite angry at hearing his lilies called nasty; and the Padre Eterno said that the word certainly ought not to

About the Lilies of San Luigi

have been used unless San Sebastiano had a very good reason.

Then San Pancrazio explained, that he was sure San Sebastiano did not mean to make any reflection upon the lilies themselves, because it would not be becoming to speak against the handiwork of the Padre Eterno; but it was because the people who offered the lilies to San Luigi did not come by them in an honourable manner, that he had said they were nasty; and San Sebastiano nodded his head and said that was just it.

These words made San Luigi still more angry; and his wrath was so righteous and unaffected, that San Sebastiano saw he was in ignorance of the dirty tricks of his clients; so he said that if the Divina Maesta would deign to allow them, he and San Pancrazio would show San Luigi where his lilies came from. The Padre Eterno was graciously pleased to grant

Stories Toto Told Me

permission, and passed on His way, for He knew San Sebastiano to be a boy whom you could trust anywhere.

Then San Sebastiano told San Luigi that if he could put up with the company of San Pancrazio he proposed they should make a little gita into the world that very night; because, as the next day was his festa, all the boys would be getting lilies for his altars; and in the meantime he invited him to come and look over the ramparts.

So the three saints went and stood upon the wall of gold; and, beneath their feet, they could see the world whirling round in space. San Sebastiano pointed out that, by midnight, they would be just above a little white town which clustered up the side of a distant mountain. He said that it was called Genzano, and that the Prince Francesco Sforza Cesarini had there a palace with the most beautiful gardens in the

About the Lilies of San Luigi

world, which were sure to be full of lilies at that time of year.

San Luigi made answer that he would like to say his matins and lauds, and to get his meditation ready for the morning, before they started; and he agreed to meet San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio at a little before midnight.

You know, sir, that there is no night in heaven, or rather, I should say, that it does not get dark there; and so, when San Luigi came to look for San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio, he found them in the orchard near the gate, turning a skipping-rope for Sant' Agnese and some of her friends; but San Vito and San Venanzio, being tired of playing morra, were willing to take their places at the rope, and then they were all ready to start on their journey.

San Sebastiano called his angel, Sebastianello, and told him where he wanted to go.

Stories Toto Told Me

I ought to have let you know that the appearance of Sebastianello was exactly like that of San Sebastiano, only he did not carry an arrow, and he had wings growing out of his arms of the same colour as his body, but getting whiter towards the tips of the feathers. And then, of course, he was as big as a giant, like all the other angels—how many yards high I cannot say, because I do not exactly know.

The three saints mounted him in this manner: San Pancrazio stood on his left instep and put one arm round his leg to steady himself; and San Sebastiano stood on his right instep and put one arm round his leg to steady himself too; San Luigi also stood on the right instep of Sebastianello, close to San Sebastiano, who clasped him round the waist with his other arm. When they were ready the angel, with a downward swoop of his wings, rose from off the wall

About the Lilies of San Luigi

of gold, and then, spreading them out to their full extent, remained motionless and dropped gently but swiftly towards the earth.

I should tell you that they had all made themselves invisible, as the saints do when they come down into the world, except when there is some one present who is good enough to merit a vision of the gods. And when they alighted in the garden by the magnolia tree, they left the angel there, and went to sit down near the lily-beds. You understand that no one could see them, and they rested against the edge of the fountain and waited; and San Luigi took out his beads to while away the time.

Presently, three or four men came into the garden very quietly, and they stood under the shade of a blue hydrangea bush. The eldest of them appeared to be giving directions to the others, and then they

Stories Toto Told Me

separated, and went each to a different part of the garden.

"Who were those men?" asked San Luigi.

"Tell him, 'Bastiano,'" said San Pancrazio in a whisper.

"Gardeners," murmured San Sebastiano; "they have to stay up all the night between the twentieth and the twenty-first of June."

"And I suppose they will be going to cut the lilies for the boys who are coming to fetch them?" said San Luigi.

San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio nearly choked with laughter; and then San Sebastiano said that, if San Luigi would have the goodness to be patient, he should see what he should see.

They watched the gardeners go and hide themselves in the syringas, and for some time there was silence.

Then there came six ragamuffin boys,

About the Lilies of San Luigi

creeping cautiously through the darkness, and they made their way towards the lily-beds. As soon as they got there, the men in the bushes jumped out upon them with a loud yell, whereupon the boys took to their heels and fled in a different direction from that by which they had come. The men gave chase, but they ran so swiftly that they were soon out of sight. Now, as soon as they were gone, twenty or thirty more ragamuffin boys rushed noiselessly out of the darkness, and began to cut the lilies into sheaves as fast as they could. In a short time there was not one left standing, and then they made off with their spoils and disappeared.

The next minute the gardeners came back, loudly lamenting that they had failed to catch the robbers; but when they saw the beds where the lilies once stood, they called for the Madonna to have pity on them. And the chief gardener wept, for he

Stories Toto Told Me

said the Prince would surely send him to prison.

And the three saints sat still by the fountain.

San Luigi was trembling very greatly; but because he is, as you know, of such wonderful innocence, he did not understand what he had seen; and he begged his companions to explain it to him.

So San Sebastiano told him that the boys of the world were wicked little devils, and very clever, too. So they sent the six best runners first, because they knew the gardeners would be watching. And these six were to make the gardeners chase them and lead them a long dance, so that the others could come, as soon as the place was clear, and steal the lilies. All of which had been done.

And then San Luigi was very grieved; but most of all because the gardeners would lose their places. So he asked San Sebas-

About the Lilies of San Luigi

tiano if he could not do something for them.

Then San Sebastiano said that they would be very pleased and quite happy if San Luigi would show himself to them, for they were most respectable men, and pious into the bargain; neither had they sworn nor used bad words.

But San Luigi was so modest that he did not like to show himself alone, and he held out his hands, the one to San Sebastiano and the other to San Pancrazio, saying:

“My friends — if you allow me to say so — dear 'Bastiano — dear Pancrazio — who have both been so kind to me, let us all show ourselves, and then I will give them back the lilies.”

So they called Sebastianello and mounted upon his insteps again; and then a silver light, more bright than the moon, beamed from them, and the gardeners saw in the midst of the blaze the great angel

Stories Toto Told Me

by the magnolia tree, and the three saints standing in front of him — San Luigi in the middle, with San Sebastiano on his right hand and San Pancrazio on his left hand, with their arms round each other. Then the gardeners fell on their knees and returned thanks for this vision; and, as the angel spread his wings and rose from the ground, San Luigi made the sign of the cross over the garden. And the men stood amazed and watched till the brightness seemed to be only a tiny star; and so the three saints went back with Sebastianello into heaven.

And, after they had disappeared, the gardeners saw that the lily-beds were full of flowers more beautiful than had ever been seen before. But when the thieves brought their stolen flowers to the Church of San Luigi in the Via Livia they were nothing but sticks and dirty weeds.

And the three saints are most friendly

About the Lilies of San Luigi

together now, because San Sebastiano and San Pancrazio cannot help admiring San Luigi for his strange innocence, as well as for the strange penance with which he gained his place in heaven; and they are always delighted to do anything to oblige him, because they have been longer there than he has, and understand the ways of that blessed place so well; while San Luigi carries only the lilies of Paradise now, and is never so happy as when he is choosing the best branches of golden palm for his two martyr-friends; nor is he ever shocked at San Pancrazio because he is of a gay heart, nor at San Sebastiano because he is naked and not ashamed.

How could he be ashamed, sir?

III

A CAPRICE OF THE CHERUBIM

WHEN you have the happiness, sir, to see the Padre Eterno sitting upon His throne, I can assure you that, at least, your eyes will be delighted with the sight of many splendid persons who are there also.

These, you know, are called the angels, and they are in nine rows. All these rows are in the shape of an egg with pointed ends, just like that gold ring on your finger. Those in the first row are named serafini. Those in the second row are called cherubini; and you will find their appearance quite beautiful and curious to look at. They have neither arms, nor bodies, nor legs, like the other angels, but are simply heads like those of

A Caprice of the Cherubim

little boys. Their eyes are as brown as the shadows on the stream, where you fished last Thursday, when the sun was shining through the trees. Their skin, if you will only believe me, has the colour and brightness of the blue jewels which la Signora Duchessa sometimes wears, and their hair waves like the sea at Ardea. They have no ears; but, in the place where the ears of a boy would be, they have wings shaped like those of a sand-piper, and blue as the sky at day-dawn. These flutter and shine for ever in regular watches in the second ring of the Glory of the Highest, and cool the perfumed air with the gentle quivering of their feathers.

Once upon a time, some of the cherubini came to hear of the pastimes with which people in the world weary themselves; and they humbly asked permission of the Padre Eterno to make a little gita down to the earth, and to have a little

Stories Toto Told Me

divel to play with next time they were off duty. And the Padre Eterno, Who always allows you to have your own way when He knows it will teach you a lesson, making the sign of the cross, said, “✠ It is allowed to you.”

So the following day a very large number — I believe about ninety-five millions, but I should not like to be quite sure, because I do not exactly know — of these beautiful little blue birds of Heaven were taken by San Michele Arcangiolo down into the world, and they perched on the trees in the gardens of the Palazzo Sforza Cesarini, in that city over the lake.

San Michele Arcangiolo left them there, and made the second of his journeys into the pit of hell. The first, you know, was after he had conquered the King of the divels in a dreadful duel and bound him in chains and flames for ever and the day after. As he passed along the pathway,

A Caprice of the Cherubim

down the red-hot rocks, the flames of the burning divels licked up till, meeting the cool air of Heaven which San Michele Arcangiolo breathed, they curved backward, and still upward, forming a sort of triumphal arch of yellow flame above his head.

When he arrived at the gate where hope must be laid down, he called aloud that the Father and King of gods and men had occasion for the services of a young imp named Aeschmai Davi. The arch-fiend shook his chains with rage, because he was obliged to obey; and caused a horrible dæmon to flash into bodily shape from a puddle of molten brimstone.

If you looked at his face or his body, you would have thought he was a boy about fourteen years old; but his eyeballs glittered with the red of a burning coal. If you looked at his arms, you would have thought he was a bat, for wings grew

Stories Toto Told Me

there of spikes and skin. Oh, and he had nasty little horns in his hair, but it was not hair but vipers; and from his waist to his feet he was a he-goat, and all over he was scarlet. It was a different scarlet to the scarlet coat of that English soldier whom I saw once near the Porta Pia of Rome. I can only make you understand what I mean, by saying that it was the colour of the ashes of burning wood, which have been almost dead, but which you have blown up again into a fiery glow. He was of the most bad and hideous from his hoofs to his horns; and no one, whether he was a saint, or an angel, or a man like you, sir, as long as he had the protection of the Madonna, would need to be a bit afraid of him, because his nastiness was clear, and he could be seen through like a piece of glass; and in the middle of him there was his dirty dangling heart as black as ink.

A Caprice of the Cherubim

San Michele Arcangiolo, who knows exactly how to deal with everybody, and especially with a *scimiotto* like this, stuck his lance into the middle of the little divel's stomach, just as Gianetta would spit a woodcock for toasting, and holding it out before him, because it is always best to see mischief in front of you, carried the writhing, wriggling little divel up into the world. The flames, as before, licked upward and around the great archangel, but never a feather was singed nor a blister came upon his whitest skin, because they could not pierce the ice of his purity; but they made the little divel kick and struggle, — just as I should, sir, if you whipped me naked with a whip of red-hot wires, instead of with the lilac twigs you do use when I am disobedient.

So they came into the Prince his garden; and having released the little divel from his uncomfortable position, San

Stories Toto Told Me

Michele Arcangiolo — who, because he commands the armies in heaven, is very fond of soldiers — went down into the city to pass a half-hour inspecting the barracks.

When the little divel found himself free, he could hardly believe his good luck, and sat for a few minutes rubbing the sparks out of his eyes, and wondering what his next torture would be. Meanwhile, the cherubini sat in the trees saying nothing, but watching with all their might, for they never had seen such a thing before.

Presently, as nothing happened to the little divel, he plucked up what small courage he had and took a sly look round. The first thing he saw was the fountain near the magnolia tree; and as the divels know very well what water is, although a rare commodity in their own country, where one drop is worth more than all the

A Caprice of the Cherubim

wealth the world has ever seen, he plunged head first into the basin, to cool the burning pangs which always torment him. And still the cherubini said not a word, but watched with all their eyes.

Now the basin, sir, is a deep one, as you know, because you have often dived in there yourself when the sun was in Leo. And the little divel disappeared under the water. But a moment after his head popped up, twitching with pain, amid clouds of steam and a frightful hissing; and he screamed very much and began to clamber over the edge as fast as possible.

When he got on to the grass, he jumped and skipped all over the place, and shook his wings and squeezed his hairy legs, and stroked his naked breast, and rolled about on the ground, and leaped and howled, till the cherubini found him most diverting, and laughed so much that they tumbled

Stories Toto Told Me

out of the trees, and came and fluttered round the little divel; for this was a far funnier entertainment even than that which they had promised themselves.

And the reason of it all is very easy to understand, if you will only think. You see, one of the torments that the divels and the damned have to bear is to be always disappointed; they never get their wishes fulfilled; all their plans, no matter how carefully they construct them, fall to the ground; all their arrangements are always upset at the very last moment, and everything goes by the rule of contrary. So when the wretched little creature plunged into the cold water, the heat of hell-flame boiled it, and the Breath of God made it hotter still; and so, instead of being cooled at all, the little divel got handsomely scalded.

Now, when the cherubini had had their fill of laughter, and could observe accu-

A Caprice of the Cherubim

rately this sight, which was to them so strange, they saw great patches of scalded flesh hanging in shreds and strips from his neck and sides and back and belly, and the skinny leather of his wings crinkled and warped, and the horn of his hoofs beginning to peel; and they would have felt sorry, if to grieve over a little divel had not been wrong. So they said nothing, hovering in the air around him, and looking at him with their clear eyes all the time.

The little divel looked at them too; and, being a cheeky little beast, he asked who, the hell, they were staring at.

They said that they wanted to play with him, and they desired him to do some more tricks, and to tell them merry stories, and where he came from, and what he did there, and how he liked it, and why he had that nasty black heart-shaped blotch hanging in the middle of his inside, and many other things.

Stories Toto Told Me

And the little divel said that he had had a bad accident, and he was not going to hurt his throat by shouting to a lot of blue birds up there in the sky; and if they wanted him to answer their questions, they must come down lower, because he was in great pain.

And the cherubini wondered very much where this pain could be in which the little divel said he was, and, also, what kind of thing was this same pain: but, as they were curious and wanted to know, they descended a bit until they fluttered in a ring round and round the little divel's head.

And there they became aware of a horrible stench, and they said to one another: "He stinks — stinks of sin!" But, because they wished to be diverted, they resolved to put up with small inconveniences for a while.

Still the little divel was not satisfied; and perceiving that these would be very

A Caprice of the Cherubim

agreeable playmates, he tried to make a good impression. So he flopped down upon his stomach, and propped his chin up in his hands, and invited the cherubini to come and sit round him and listen to such tales as they had never heard before. And the cherubini came a little lower, but they did not sit down.

And then other things happened.

And, suddenly, the cherubini found that they did not desire to play with this little divel any longer; and with one swoop of their wings, sounding like the strong chord you strike, sir, when you begin to play on the chitarone in the evening, they went back into Paradise; while the earth opened under the little divel, and a red flame, shaped like a hand with claws, came up and gripped and squeezed him so tightly round the waist, that his face bulged, and his eyes went out like crabs', and his breasts swelled like pumpkins, and

Stories Toto Told Me

his shoulders and arms like sausages, and his middle was like Donna Lina's, and the skin of his hairy thighs became balloons and burst, and then he was tossed back into his puddle of molten brimstone.

When the Ave rang, and this company of cherubini went on duty in the Aureola, the Padre Eterno observed, from the expression of their faces, that they had been insulted and their feelings hurt. And, when La Sua Maesta deigned to inquire the reason, they replied that the little divel, whom He had allowed them to play with, had been very rude, and they had no desire to see him any more; for they had asked him to show them funny tricks and to tell them merry stories, and where he came from, and what he did there, how he liked it, why he had a nasty black heart-shaped blotch dangling in the middle of his inside, and so forth, and that he had said he would be pleased to answer all this and

A Caprice of the Cherubim

to play with them if they would come and sit down on the grass round him; but they had to reply that they were not able to sit down, and the little divel had asked why not; and they had answered politely that they had not the wherewithal; and then the little divel jumped up from the ground, where he was lying with his legs a-straddling, and showed them that he could sit down, and had turned head over heels, and laughed and made a gibe and a jeer of them, because he could do things they could not do, and had also done many other disgusting tricks before them, which had caused them much offence; and so they were bored and came back to Paradise.

They added that they did not desire to mix up with that class of person again; and begged pardon if they had seemed to prefer their own will this time.

And the Padre Eterno smiled, and at that Smile the light of Heaven glowed

Stories Toto Told Me

like a rainbow, and the music rose in a strain so beautiful that I believe I shall die when I hear it, and He made the sign of the cross and said: "It is well, My children, and God bless you. Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus + Pater et + Filius et + Spiritus Sanctus."

IV

ABOUT BEATA BEATRICE AND THE MAMMA OF SAN PIETRO

“ **A** H sir, don't be angry with me, because I really do love her so! What else can I do when she is as pretty as that; and always good and cheerful and patient? And when I met her last evening by the boat-house, I took her into my arms asking her to kiss me, and, sir, she did. And then I told her that I loved her dearly, and she said she loved me too. And I said that when I grew up I would marry her, and when I looked into her eyes they were full of tears, so I know she loves me; but she is ashamed because she is so poor, and her mamma such a hag. But do I mind her being poor — the little pigeon? Ma che! For when I feel her soft

Stories Toto Told Me

arms round me and her breath in my hair, then I kiss her on the lips and neck and bosom, and I know it is Beatrice, her body and her soul, that I want and that I care for, not her ragged clothes."

Toto jumped off the tree trunk and stood before me, with all his lithe young figure tense and strung up, as he went on with his declamatory notices.

"Has not your excellency said that I am strong like an ox, and will it not be my joy to work hard to make my girl happy and rich and grand as the sun? Do you think that I spend what you give me at the wine-shop or the tombola? You know that I don't. Yes, I have always saved, and now I shall save more, and in a year or two I shall ask your permission to marry her. No, I don't want to go away, or to leave you. May the devil fly away with me to the pit of hell and burn me for ever with his hottest fire, if I do. Nor will

About Beata Beatrice

Beatrice make any difference to your excellency; you need never see her, you need never even know that there is such a flower of Paradise, such an angel, living near you, if you don't wish to know it. And I can assure you that Beatrice has the greatest respect for you; and if you will only be so good and so kind as to let us make each other happy, she will be quite proud and glad to serve you as well as I do, and to help me to serve you too. And, sir, you know how fond you are of a fritto? Ah well, Beatrice can make a rigaglie so beautiful, that you will say it must have come straight from Heaven; and this I know because I have tried it myself."

He flung himself down on the ground and kissed my hands, and kissed my feet, and wept, and made me an awful scene.

I told him to get up and not be a young fool. I said that I did n't care what he did, and asked if I had ever been a brute

Stories Toto Told Me

to him, or denied him anything that was reasonable.

He swore that I was a saint, a saint from Heaven, that I always had been and always should be, because I could not help myself; and was going down on his knees again; but I stopped that; and said he had better bring me the girl, and not make me hotter than I was, with his noise.

“To tell you the truth, sir,” he replied, “I was always quite sure that you would have pity upon us when you knew how very much we loved each other. And when you caught us last night, I told Beatrice that now I must let you know everything, because I was certain that, as long as I did not deceive you, and you know that I have never done so, there was nothing to be afraid of; and I told her you would without doubt like to see her to give her good counsel, because she was

And the Mamma of San Pietro

my friend; and she said that she would call that too much honour. Then I felt her trembling against my heart, so I kissed her for a long time, and said she must be brave like I am; and, sir, as you are so gracious as to want to see her, I have taken the liberty of bringing her, and she is here."

I had always admired the cleverness of this lad, and was not much surprised at his last announcement.

"Where?" I said.

"I put her behind that tree, sir," and he pointed to a big oak about twenty yards away. I could not help laughing at his deepness; and he took courage, I suppose, from my auspicious aspect. All sorts of clouds of hesitation, uncertainty, and doubt, moved out of his clear brown eyes, while his face set in a smile, absurd, and complacently expectant. "Shall I fetch her, sir?"

Stories Toto Told Me

I nodded. I had had some experience of his amours before; but this was a new phase, and I thought I might as well be prepared for *anything*. He went a few paces away, and disappeared behind the oak tree. There was a little rustle of the underwood, and some kissing for a minute or two. Then he came out again, leading his companion by the hand. I said I was prepared for anything, but I confess to a little gasp at what I saw. It was not a boy and girl who approached me, but a couple of boys — apparently, at least. They came and stood beside the hammock in which I was lying. Toto, you know, was sixteen years old, a splendid, wild (*discolo*) creature, from the Abruzzi, a figure like Cellini's Perseus, skin brown, with real red blood under it, smooth as a peach, and noble as a god. He had a weakness for sticking a dead-white rose in the black waves of hair over his left

About Beata Beatrice

ear, and the colour of that rose against his cheeks, flushed as they were now, was something to be truly thankful for. I used to make him wear white clothes, on these hot summer days down by the lake. A silk shirt with all the buttons undone and the sleeves rolled up, showing his broad brown chest and supple arms; and short breeches of the same, convenient for rowing. (He had half-a-dozen creatures like himself under his command, and their business was to carry my books, photographic and insect-hunting apparatus, and to wait upon me while I loafed the summers away in the Alban hills, or along the eastern coast.) The seeming boy, whom he had called Beatrice, looked about fourteen years old, and far more delicately dainty, even, than he was. The bold, magnificent independence of his carriage was replaced in her by one of tenderness and softness, quite as striking in its way

Stories Toto Told Me

as the other. She wore her hair in a short silky mop like Toto, and her shirt was buttoned up to the spring of her pretty throat. She was about as high as her boy's shoulder, and stood before me with her poor little knees trembling, and a rosy blush coming and going over her face. They were so exquisitely lovely, in that sun-flecked shade with the blue lake for a background, that I could not help keeping them waiting a few minutes. Such pictures as this are not to be seen every day. Presently he put his arm round her neck, and she put hers round his waist, and leaned against him a little. But he never took his eyes off mine.

"Go on, Toto," I said; "what were you going to say?"

"Ah, well, sir, you see I thought if Beatrice came to live with us — with me, I mean — it would be more convenient

And the Mamma of San Pietro.

if she looked like the rest of us, because then she would be able to do things for you as well as we can, and people will not talk."

It struck me immediately that Toto was right again, as usual; for, upon my word, this girl of his would pass anywhere for a very pretty boy, with just the plump roundness of the Florentine Apollino, and no more.

"So I got some clean clothes of Guido's, and brought them here early this morning, and then I fetched Beatrice and put them on her, and hid her behind the tree, because I knew you would scold me about her when you came down to read the papers; and I determined to tell you everything, and to let you know that the happiness of us both was in your hands. And I only wanted you to see her like this, in order that you might know that you will not be put to any discomfort or

Stories Toto Told Me

inconvenience, if you are so kind as to allow us to love each other."

This looked right enough; but, whether or not, there was no good in being nasty-tempered just then, so I told them to be as happy as they liked, and that I would not interfere with them as long as they did not interfere with me. They both kissed my hands, and I kissed Beatrice on the forehead, and cheeks and lips, Toto looking on as proud as a white peacock. And then I told him to take her away and send her home properly dressed, and return to me in half an hour.

I could see very well that all these happenings were natural enough; and it was not a part I cared to play, to be harsh or ridiculous, or to spoil an idyll so full of charm and newness. Besides, I have reason to know, oh jolly well, the futility of interfering between the male animal and his mate.

About Beata Beatrice

So when Toto came back I said nothing discouraging or *ennuyant*, beyond reminding him that he ought to make quite sure of possessing an enduring love for this girl, — a love which would make him proud to spend his life with, and for, her, and her only. I told him he was very young, which was no fault of his, and that if he would take my advice he would not be in a hurry about anything. He said that my words were the words of wisdom, and that he would obey me just as he would the Madonna del Portone in her crown of glory if she came down and told him things then and there; that he had known Beatrice since they had been babies together, and had always loved her far better than his sisters, and in a different way too, if I could only understand. Last night, when he had held her in his arms, he told her that he knew she wished him well; and felt himself so strong, and she so tender,

Stories Toto Told Me

and so tempting, that all of a minute he desired her for his own, and to give somebody a *bastonatura* of the finest for her, and to take her out of the clutches of that dirty mean old witch-cat of a mamma of hers, who never gave her any pleasure, kept her shut up whenever there was a festa, and, Saints of Heaven! sometimes beat her, simply because she envied her for being beautiful, and delicate, and bright, as a young primrose. "What a hag of a mamma it was to be cursed with, and what could the Madonna be thinking about to give such a *donniciuola* of a mamma to his own *bellacuccia*! Not but what the Madonnina was sometimes inattentive; but then, of course, she had so many people to look after, or she could not have given such a mamma to San Pietro as she did."

Here I saw a chance of changing the subject, and remarked that it would be

And the Mamma of San Pietro

nice to know what sort of a mamma the Madonna had given to San Pietro.

Ah, well, sir, you must know that the mamma of San Pietro was the meanest woman that ever lived — scraping and saving all the days of her life, and keeping San Pietro and his two sisters (the nun and the other one, of whom I will tell you another time), for days together with nothing to eat except perhaps a few potato peelings and a cheese rind. As for acts of kindness and charity to her neighbours, I don't believe she knew what they were, though of course I am not certain; and whatever good San Pietro had in him, he must have picked up somewhere else. As soon as he was old enough to work he became a fisherman, as you know; because, when the Santissimo Salvatore wanted a Santo Padre to govern the Church, He went down to the seaside and chose San Pietro, for He knew that, as San Pietro was a

Stories Toto Told Me

fisherman, he would be just the man to bear all kinds of hardships, and to catch people's souls and take them to Paradise, just as he had been used to catch fish and take them to the market. And so San Pietro went to Rome, and reigned there for many years. And at last the Pagans settled that all the Christians had to be killed. And the Christians thought that, though they had no objection to being killed themselves, it would be a pity to waste a good Pope like San Pietro, who had been chosen and given to them by the Signor Iddio Himself. Therefore they persuaded San Pietro to run away on a night of the darkest, and to hide himself for a time in a lonely place outside the gates of the city. After he had gone a little way along the Via Appia—and the night was very dark—he saw a grey light on the road in front of him, and in the light there was the Santissimo Him-

About Beata Beatrice

self; and San Pietro was astonished, for La Sua Maesta was walking towards Rome. And San Pietro said: "O Master, where do you go?" And the face of the Santissimo became very sad, and He said: "I am going to Rome to be crucified again." And then San Pietro knew it was not a noble thing that he was doing, to run away on the sly like this; because a shepherd does not leave his sheep when wolves come — at least, no shepherd worth a *baiocco*.

Then San Pietro turned round and went back himself to Rome, and was crucified with much joy between two posts in the Circus of Nero; but he would not be crucified like the Santissimo, because he wished to make amends for his weakness in trying to run away; and he begged and prayed to be crucified with his head where his feet ought to be. The Pagans said most certainly, if he liked it that way, it was all the same to them. And so San

Stories Toto Told Me

Pietro made no more ado, but simply went straight to Heaven. And, of course, when he got there his angel gave him a new cope and a tiara and his keys, and the Padre Eterno put him to look after the gate, which is a very great honour, but only his due, because he had been of such high rank when he lived in the world. Now after he had been there a little while, his mamma also left the world, and was not allowed to come into Paradise, but because of her meanness she was sent to hell. San Pietro did not like this at all, and when some of the other saints chaffed him about it he used to grow angry. At last he went to the Padre Eterno, saying that it was by no means suitable that a man of his quality should be disgraced in this way; and the Padre Eterno, Who is so good, so full of pity and of mercy that He would do anything to oblige you if it is for the health of your soul, said He

And the Mamma of San Pietro

was sorry for San Pietro, and He quite understood his position. He suggested that perhaps the case of San Pietro's mamma had been decided hurriedly, and He ordered her Angel-guardian to bring the book in which had been written down all the deeds of her life, good or bad.

"Now," said the Padre Eterno, "We will go carefully through this book, and, if We can find only one good deed that she has done, We will add to that the merits of Our Son and of hers, so that she may be delivered from eternal torments."

Then the Angel read out of the book, and it was found that, in the whole of her life, she had only done one good deed; for a poor starving beggar-woman had once asked her, per 'l Amore di Dio, to give her some food; and she had thrown her the top of an onion which she was peeling for her own supper.

And the Padre Eterno instructed the

Stories Toto Told Me

Angel-guardian of San Pietro's mamma to take that onion-top, and to go and hold it over the pit of hell, so that if, by chance, she should boil up with the other damned souls to the top of that stew, she might grasp the onion-top and by it be dragged up to Heaven.

The Angel did as he was commanded and hovered in the air over the pit of hell, holding out the onion-top in his hand; and the furnace flamed, and the burning souls boiled and writhed like *pasta* in a copper pot, and presently San Pietro's mamma came up thrusting out her hands in anguish, and when she saw the onion-top she gripped it, for she was a very covetous woman, and the Angel began to rise into the air, carrying her up towards Heaven.

Now when the other damned souls saw that San Pietro's mamma was leaving them, they also desired to escape, and

About Beata Beatrice

they hung on to the skirts of her gown, hoping to be delivered from their pain; and still the Angel rose, and San Pietro's mother held the onion-top, and many tortured souls hung on to her skirts, and others to the feet of those, and again others on to them, and you would surely have thought that hell was going to be emptied straight away. And still the Angel rose higher, and the long stream of people all hanging to the onion-top rose too, nor was the onion-top too weak to bear the strain: so great is the virtue of one good deed. But when San Pietro's mamma became aware of what was going on, and of the numbers who were escaping from hell along with her, she did not like it: and, because she was a nasty selfish and cantankerous woman, she kicked and struggled, and took the onion-top in her teeth, so that she might use her hands to beat off those who were hanging to her

Stories Toto Told Me

skirts. And she fought so violently that she bit through the onion-top, and tumbled back once more into hell flame.

“So you see, sir, that it is sure to be to your own advantage if you are kind to other people and let them have their own way, so long as they don’t interfere with you.”

I chuckled at Toto’s moral reflections.

V

ABOUT THE HERESY OF FRA SERAFICO

ONE of Toto's brothers was called Nicola, and he was going to be a priest. He was nineteen years old, and very like Toto in appearance, with this notable difference—there was no light in his eyes. In manner, he was a curious, gaunt, awkward, unworldly creature; absolutely the opposite of Toto, who had the charm and freedom of a young savage on the loose. I don't know why the clergy, for whom I entertain the highest respect, of course, should always slink along by the wall, expressing by the cringing obsequiousness of their carriage that they would take it as a favour for some one to kick them, but

Stories Toto Told Me

such is the case. I used to see this Nicola sneaking about during his summer vacation, but I don't think I ever spoke to him except when he came to say "How do you do?" and "Good-bye." One morning, soon after his arrival, I asked Toto what was the matter with his brother; for he looked even more caged, humpty-backed, and slouching, more utterly miserable and crushed, than usual. "'Cola, sir," he said, "you must know, has a very feeling heart; and if he meets with any little misfortune it is a much more serious thing to him than it would be to me. I, of course, would say that it did n't matter, and look for something else to amuse me; but 'Cola will think over his grief so much till it seems far greater than it really is; and he will not be able to eat his food or take any interest in anything, and wish he was dead or that he had never given himself the annoyance of being born. And I sup-

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

pose, now, he has had some little trouble in his college — dropped his garter, perhaps, and let his stocking down when out with the camerata in the street, and he has thought about it so much that he believes he has committed a sin against the sixth commandment, by an indecent exposure of his person. But, if I have your leave, I will ask him, for I can see him saying his beads behind the Emissario.”

Toto ran away, and I took a little nap.

When I awoke, he was coming down the steps, holding a rhubarb leaf over his head. “I am sure you will be much amused, sir, when I tell you what is the matter with 'Cola,” he said. “I made him very angry with me because I could not help laughing at him; and he said that I should certainly burn for making a mock of the clergy — clergy, indeed, and he only a sub-deacon, and I his brother who know all about him, and everything he ever did!

Stories Toto Told Me

And Geltruda, too! For my part, I am sure it is a gift straight from Heaven to be a priest, because I remember that 'Cola used to be quite as fond of enjoying himself as I am, but since he went to the Seminario he will not look at a petticoat — that is to say, the face that belongs to it, for it is only the petticoats he does look at. Have I not seen my little mother cry when he came home, because he only put his lips to her hand — and they did n't touch it — as if she were la Signora Duchessa, instead of the mother who wished to take him in her arms? But his dolour now, sir, is this. You must know that at the Seminario, you have to preach to the other chierichetti in the refectory, during supper. This is to give you practice in delivering sermons. And after you have preached, you go to your place; and, if it is necessary to make any remarks upon what you have said, the professors tell you

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

all they think. Well, it was 'Cola's turn to preach the night before he came home, and he says that it was a sermon which he had taken all his life to write. He had learnt it by heart; and on arriving in the pulpit he repeated it, moving his hands and his body in a manner which he had practised before his mirror, without making a single mistake. When he had finished, the rector paid him compliments, and two or three of the other professors did the same. But when it came to the turn of the decano, who is the senior student, he said that the college ought to be very proud of having produced an abbatino so clever as to be able, in his first sermon, to invent and proclaim sixteen new and hitherto unheard-of heresies. And 'Cola, instead of feeling a fine rage against this nasty, jealous prig, with his mocking tongue, takes all the blame to himself and is making himself wretched.

Stories Toto Told Me

I told him that there was no difficulty about heresies, if that was what he wanted, because I think that to do wrong is as easy as eating, and that the difficulty is to keep straight. But he says he is a miserable sinner, and that it is all his fault, for he cannot have perfectly corresponded with his vocation. Why, as for heresy, sir, I will tell you how a friar in Rome was accused of preaching heresy, and then you will know that it is not always the being accused of inventing heresies that makes you guilty of that same.

Ah, well, formerly there lived in Rome a certain friar called Fra Serafico. When he had lived in the world he was of the Princes of Monte Corvino, but at about the age of 'Cola he astonished everybody by giving up his rank and his riches and his state, and becoming a son of San Francesco. Now the fraticelli of his convent were not quite able to under-

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

stand why a young man who had his advantages, should give them up as he did, and prefer a shaved head and naked feet and to be a beggar. And Fra Serafico, though he had the best will in the world, did not make a good impression on the other friars, because his manners were different to theirs. He felt miserable without a pocket-handkerchief for his nose. And it was some time before the superiors became certain that he had a true vocation, for he went about his duties with diligence and humility, feeling so shy, because the things around him were so strange, that he gained for himself, amongst the other novices, the nickname of 'Dumbtongue.'

And this went on until he had finished his probation, and taken the habit and the vows.

One day after this, the Superior, in order to give him a good humiliation, told him to prepare to preach a sermon before

Stories Toto Told Me

the convent at the chapter that afternoon. Fra Serafico received this command in silence, and, having kissed the ground before the Fra Guardiano, he went away to his cell, and when the afternoon came he stood up to preach.

Then, sir, a very curious thing happened, for Fra Serafico preached, and while he preached the faces of the other friars became set in a glare of astonishment, and the eyes of the Fra Guardiano were almost starting out of his head by the time the sermon was finished. Then there was silence for a little while, and the friars looked at one another and nodded. It seems that they had been entertaining an angel unawares, for this Dumbtongue, as they called him, had turned out to be a perfect Golden-mouth. And the friars were more than glad; for, though they were all good men and very holy, they had no great preacher among

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

them at the time, and they thought it was a shame that an order, whose business was to preach, should have no man who could preach well, and at last they saw a way out of the difficulty: 'For surely,' they said, 'this Serafico speaks the words of San Paolo himself, with the tongue of an angel.' After this he gave fervorini daily in the convent church, till all the city was filled with his fame, and at last he was named by Papa Silvio to preach the Lent in the Church of San Carlo al Corso.

Of course you know very well, sir, that the devil is always disgusted to see the works of God going on as easily as water running out of a turned-on tap, and you know also that when a good work seems to be thriving at its best, then is the time the devil chooses to try to upset it. And so he went to a little Jesuit called Padre Tonto Pappagallo — and, of course,

Stories Toto Told Me

I need not tell you that the Jesuits are not what you might call friendly to the Franciscans—and he suggested to him the evil thought, that it was a bad thing for the Jesuits to be beaten in preaching by the Franciscans, and what a score it would be if a Jesuit were to have the honour of catching Fra Serafico in the act of preaching heresy. Padre Tonto, it happened, had made a bad meditation that morning, having allowed his eyes to fix themselves upon some of the stone angels who were dangling their beautiful white legs over the arches round the apsis, and his thoughts to wander from his meditation to those things, which every good priest flies from with as much haste as he would fly from the foul fiend appearing in person. And so his mind was just like a fertile field; and when the devil popped in his suggestion, the seed immediately took root, and before the morning

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

was over it had burst into blossom, for this Padre Tonto cut off to the Church of San Carlo to hear the great preacher; and when he saw the vast multitude all so intent upon those golden words that if an earthquake had happened then and there I believe no one would have even blinked, and when he heard the sighs from the breasts of wicked men, and saw the tears rain down on women's cheeks, he envied Fra Serafico the power to do these things; and so he began to listen to the sermon that he might catch the preacher preaching heresy. Now, of course, while he was staring about, he had not paid attention to the words of gold, and the first sentence that caught his ear when he did begin, indeed, to listen was this, 'No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully.'

Padre Tonto jumped up and ran out of the church. He was delighted, for he had

Stories Toto Told Me

heard a heresy straight away. 'No one shall be crowned,' he said, 'that is, of course, with the crown of glory which the saints in heaven wear for ever — unless he has contended lawfully — that is to say, as the martyrs did in the Colosseo. Pr-r-r-r, my dear Serafico! And what, then, becomes of all the holy bishops and confessors, and of the virgins and penitents and widows whom Holy Church has numbered with the saints? These were not martyrs, nor did they fight with beasts, like San Paolo' (and I cannot tell you the place, sir). 'If I were Pope, Seraficone mio, I should burn your body in the Campo di Fiore to-morrow morning, and your soul in hell for ever and the day after.' And saying these words and all sorts of other things like them, he ran away to the Sant' Uffizio and made a mischief with much diligence.

Now Padre Tonto had a very good

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

reputation and was exceedingly well thought of in Rome. Moreover, the accusation he made appeared to be well founded. So Fra Serafico was sent for, and the question was put to him, 'Did you or did you not, in your sermon preached in the Church of San Carlo al Corso on the second Monday in Lent, say, "No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully?"' And Fra Serafico replied that his questioner, who was the Grand Inquisitor himself, spoke like a book with large letters and clasps of silver, for without a doubt he had used those very words. The Grand Inquisitor remarked that confession of wrong done was always good for the soul: and he pointed out to Fra Serafico the dreadful heresy of which he had been guilty in uttering words which, if they meant anything at all, meant this, *That it was impossible to get to Heaven unless you suffered mar-*

Stories Toto Told Me

tyrdom. And he told Fra Serafico, that as he had made his heresy public by preaching it to all Rome, it would be necessary to make amends also in the place of his crime, or else to let himself be burnt with fire in the Campo di Fiore on the next public holiday, both to atone for the sin, and in order to encourage other people who might feel it their business to preach heresy as he had done. And Fra Serafico answered that he wished to live and die a good and obedient son of Holy Mother Church, and to submit his judgment in all things to hers; therefore, it would give him much joy to make public amends for his heresy at any time or place which his eminence, in his wisdom, might be pleased to appoint.

The next day the people of Rome were called by proclamation to the Church of San Carlo al Corso to see Fra Serafico's humiliation; and because he was such a

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

celebrated man there came together all the noblest and most distinguished persons in the city. Papa Silvio sat upon the throne with the Princes Colonna and Orsini on his right hand and on his left. All around there were fifty scarlet cardinals, bishops by the score in purple and green, friars grey, friars white, friars black, monks by the hundred, and princes and common people like raindrops. And when they had all taken their places, Fra Serafico entered, between two officers of the Sant' Uffizio with their faces covered in the usual manner; and first he prostrated himself before the Maesta in the tabernacle, and then at the feet of Papa Silvio, then he bowed from the waist to the Sacred College and the prelates, and from the shoulders to the rest; and then he was led into the pulpit from which he had proclaimed his heresy. There he began to speak, using these words: 'Most

Stories Toto Told Me

Holy Father, most eminent and most reverend lords, my reverend brethren, most illustrious princes, my dear children in Jesus Christ. I am brought here to-day on account of the vile and deadly heresy, which I am accused of preaching from this pulpit on the first Monday in Lent. That heresy is contained in the following words: "No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully." I freely confess, acknowledge, and say, that I did, in real truth, use those words. But before I proceed to abjure the heresy contained in them, and to express with tears my penitence for the crime I have committed, I crave, my beloved children in Jesus Christ, most illustrious princes, my reverend brethren, most eminent and most reverend lords, and, prostrate at your feet, most Holy Father, indulgence for a few moments while I relate a dream and a vision which came to me during the night

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

just past, which I spent for the good of my soul upon the tender bosom of the Sant' Uffizio.' Fra Serafico's face, as he spoke, beamed with a beauty so unearthly, his manner was so gracious, and the music of his golden voice so entrancing, that Papa Silvio, making the sign of the cross, granted him the favour he had asked.

The friar went on: 'In my dream it appeared to me that I was standing before the bar of the Eternal Judge; and that there I was accused by a certain Jesuit named Padre Tonto Pappagallo of having preached heresy on the first Monday in Lent, in the Church of San Carlo al Corso, using these words: "No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully." And while I waited there, Beato Padre Francesco himself came and stood beside me. And the Judge of all men looked upon me with wrath and anger,

Stories Toto Told Me

asking whether I confessed my crime; and I, wretched man that I am, in the presence of Him who knows all things, even the inmost secrets of the heart, could do nothing else but acknowledge that it was even so. Then the Padre Eterno, who, though terrible beyond all one can conceive to evil-doers, is of a justice so clear, so fine, and straight, that the crystal of earth becomes as dark as mud, the keenness of a diamond as blunt granite, and the shortest distance between two points as crooked as the curves in a serpent's tail — this just Judge, I say, asked me, who am but a worm of the earth, whether I had anything to allege in excuse for my crime.

‘And I, covered with confusion as with a garment, because of my many sins, replied, “O Clementissimo Signor Iddio, I have confessed my crime; and in excuse I can only say that when I was preparing

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

my sermon, I took those words from the writings of San Gregorio.”

‘The Judge of all men ordered my angel to write this down, and deigned to ask whether I could say in what part of the writings of San Gregorio this heresy could be found. “O Padre Celeste Iddio,” I replied, “the heresy will be found in the 37th Homily of San Gregorio on the 14th chapter of the Gospel of San Luca.” Then I covered my face with my hands and waited for my dreadful sentence; but Beato Padre Francesco comforted me, and patted my shoulder with his hand, all shining with the sacred stigmata; and the Padre Eterno, speaking in a mild voice to the Court of Heaven, said, “My children, this little brother has been accused of preaching a heresy, and this heresy is said to have been taken from the writings of San Gregorio. In this case, you will perceive that it is not

Stories Toto Told Me

Our little brother who is a heretic, but San Gregorio, who will therefore have the goodness to place himself at the bar, for We are determined to search this matter to its remotest end." Then San Gregorio was led by his Angel-guardian from his throne among the Doctors of the Church, and came down to the bar and stood beside me and Beato Padre Francesco, who whispered in my ear, "Cheer up, little brother, and hope for the best!" And the Padre Eterno said, "San Gregorio, this little brother has been accused before Us, that on the first Monday in Lent, in the Church of San Carlo al Corso, he preached heresy in the following words: 'No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully.' We have examined him, and he alleges that he has taken these words from the 37th Homily, which you have written upon the 14th chapter of the Gospel of San Luca. We demand, therefore,

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

that you should say, first, whether you acknowledge yourself to have written these words ; and secondly, if you have done so, what excuse you have to offer?" And San Gregorio opened the book of his writings which, of course, he always carries with him, and turned the pages with an anxious finger. Presently he looked up with a smile into the Face of God and said, "O Dio, Padre delle misericordie, our little brother has spoken the truth, for I have found the passage, and when I have read it, You will find the answer to both questions which Your Condescension has put me." So San Gregorio read from his writings these words, "But we cannot arrive at the great reward unless through great labours: wherefore, that most excellent preacher, San Paolo, says, 'No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully.' The greatness of rewards, therefore, may delight the mind, but does not take away

Stories Toto Told Me

the obligation of first fighting for it.” “Hm-m-m-m,” said the Padre Eterno, “this begins to grow interesting; for it seems, my children, that our little brother here has quoted his heresy from San Gregorio, and that San Gregorio in his turn quoted it from San Paolo, upon whom, therefore, the responsibility seems to rest. Call San Paolo.”

‘So seven archangels blew their trumpets and summoned San Paolo, who was attending a meeting of the Apostolic College, and when he came into Court his Angel-guardian led him to the bar, where he took his place by the side of San Gregorio’ (the man who made them Christians in England, sir, and the chant, sir, and saw San Michele Arcangiolo on the top of the Mola), ‘of Beato Padre Francesco, and of my wretched self. “Now, San Paolo,” said the Padre Eterno, “We have here a little grey friar who has been accused of preach-

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

ing heresy on the first Monday in Lent, in the Church of San Carlo al Corso, in these words, ‘No one shall be crowned unless he has contended lawfully.’ And he has informed Us that he quoted these words from San Gregorio’s 37th Homily on the 14th chapter of the Gospel of San Luca. We have examined San Gregorio, and he has pointed out to Us that he did indeed use these words, as Our little brother has said; but San Gregorio also alleges that they are not his own words, but yours. The Court, therefore, would like to know whether San Gregorio’s statement is true.” Then San Paolo’s Angel-guardian handed to him the book which contained all the letters he had written, and after he had refreshed his memory with this, the great apostle replied, “O Principio di ogni cosa, there is no doubt that both our little brother and San Gregorio are right, for I find in my second letter to San Timoteo, chapter ii. verse

Stories Toto Told Me

5, the following words: 'And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he contend lawfully.' " "Well!" said the Padre Eterno, "this is a very shocking state of things that you, San Paolo, should publish heresies in this manner, and lead men of all ages into error! San Gregorio, taking the statement on your authority, preaches heresy in his time, and a thousand years after, our little brother, innocently thinking that men of such eminence as the Apostle of the Gentiles and the Apostle of England are of good authority, preaches the same heresy. You see now that it is impossible to know what the end of a lie will be when once it has been started on its course." "But hear me," said San Paolo, who was a very bold man, "for I venture to submit to La Sua Maesta that the second letter which I wrote to San Timoteo has been placed by Your Church on earth on the list of the

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

Canonical Books, and this means that when I wrote that letter I was inspired by the Third Person of the Maesta Coeterna dell' Adorabile Trinita and that therefore I was divinely protected from teaching error in any shape or form ! ” “ Of course it does,” replied the Padre Eterno. “ The words that you have written, San Paolo, in your second letter to San Timoteo, are not the words of a man, but the Words of God Himself, and the matter amounts to this, that our little brother here, who took the words from San Gregorio, who took them from you, who were divinely inspired to write them, has not been guilty of heresy at all, unless God Himself can err. And who,” continued the Padre Eterno, with indignation, “ We should like to know, is the ruffian who has taken up Our time with this ridiculous and baseless charge against Our little brother ? ” Somebody said that it was a Jesuit named Padre Tonto Pappa-

Stories Toto Told Me

gallo, at which the Padre Eterno sniffed and said, "A Jesuit! and what, in the name of goodness, is that?"

'So the Madonna whispered that it was a son of Sant' Ignazio of Loyola. "Where is Sant' Ignazio of Loyola?" said the Padre Eterno. Now Sant' Ignazio, who had seen the way things were going, and what a contemptible spectacle his son was presenting, had hidden himself behind a bush and was pretending to say his office. But he was soon found and brought into Court, and the Padre Eterno asked him what he meant by allowing his spiritual children to act in this way. And Sant' Ignazio only groaned and said, "O Potenza Infinita, all my life long I tried to teach them to mind their own business, but in fact I have altogether failed to make them listen to me."

'That was my dream, Most Holy Father, most eminent and most reverend lords,

About the Heresy of Fra Serafico

my reverend brethren, most illustrious princes, my beloved children in Jesus Christ; and since you have been so gracious as to listen, I will no longer delay my recantation of the heresy of which I am accused of having preached on the first Monday in Lent, in the Church of San Carlo al Corso.'

But Papa Silvio arose from his throne, and the cardinals, and the bishops, and the princes, and the people, and they all cried in a loud voice, 'Evviva, evviva, Bocca d'Oro, evviva, evviva.'"

VI

ABOUT ONE WAY IN WHICH CHRISTIANS LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

“YES,” I said, “that’s a very good story, Toto. And now I want to know where you learnt it.”

“Well, sir,” he replied, “it was told to me by Fra Leone of the Cappuccini. Not that I wish you to think the Cappuccini and Franciscans to be the same, not at all. But, of course, you know better than that, and it is like their impertinence of bronze to pretend that they are, as they do, for the Cappuccini were not even heard of for hundreds of years after San Francesco founded his Order of Little Brothers. And the reason why they came to be made was only because of the vain man Simon Something-or-other, who gave

How Christians Love One Another

more thought to his clothes than was good for his soul, and found that the sleeves which were good enough for San Francesco, and the round tippet which that heavenly saint wore did not suit his style of beauty, and so he made himself a brown habit instead of a grey one, with plain sleeves to show the shape of his arms, and no pockets in them, and a tippet not round but pointed like the piece of flesh there is between my shoulders. And then, because there are always plenty of men ready to run after something new, he got together so many followers who wished to dress themselves like him, that the Santo Padre preferred to give them permission to have their own way, rather than cause them to become rebels against our Holy Mother the Church, by making it difficult for them to be obedient; because the matter had really no importance to speak of."

Stories Toto Told Me

I said that I knew all about that, but that I didn't believe that religious men, whether they were Franciscans, or sham ones like the Cappuccini, or even Jesuits, would show such jealousy and envy of each other as appeared in the story of Fra Serafico.

"And there," said Toto, "I can assure you that you are altogether wrong. I may tell you that in every religious order there are two kinds of men—the saints and the sinners; and of course, the saints always love each other as Francesco and Domenico did; and, by contrary, having submitted themselves to the infernal dragon who always drives all love out of the hearts of his slaves and inflames them with the undying fire of envy, the sinners hate each other with a hatred like the poison of vipers, and occupy themselves with all kinds of schemes by which they may bring discredit upon their enemies, the

How Christians Love One Another

sinner of other orders. Why, I will tell you a tale which is quite true, because I have seen it, of how some Cappuccini—and you will not ask me to say where their convent is—have done a deed by which much shame will some day be brought upon a house of Jesuits who live in their neighbourhood.

Well, then, there was a convent of Cappuccini, and outside the grounds of the convent there was a small house in which I lived with my father and my mother and my brothers and sisters, and it was a very lonely place. And about as far off as it would take you to say five Paters, and five Aves, and five Glorias, there was another house, and there were perhaps three or four cottages in sight, and that is all, so it was a very lonely place. But six miles away there was a large college of Jesuits, up in the hills, and when a Jesuit died it was the

Stories Toto Told Me

custom to bury him in the churchyard of the Cappuccini.

Now there was a man who came to live in the other house, and he was not an old man nor a young man, but just between the two, and because he felt lonely he used to pay attentions to all the ladies who came in his way when visiting this celebrated convent of Cappuccini ; and our difficulty was to know which one he was going to marry. And there was one in particular who appeared to these Cappuccini to be the one that he ought to marry, but her home was far away in a large town ; and so one of the friars wrote to her parish priest to ask what ought to be done ; and the parish priest replied : ‘ Yes, you must get her married as soon as possible ’ ; and soon after that the respectable man married her and brought her to the house in the lonely place that I am telling you about. And they lived there very quietly

How Christians Love One Another

for a little while, and then his business called the respectable man away from his house for a few weeks. So he went, and his wife remained at home; and there was no one in the house besides her but a woman, her servant.

And presently, in the middle of one night, there was a knocking at the door of the small house where I lived with my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, and I heard this knocking because that night I was going to enjoy myself in the orchard of the Cappuccini. So I came downstairs in my shirt only; and, because I wished to keep secret what I was going to do, I left my shirt rolled up in a bundle under the seat in the porch, and I will tell you why: I thought of two things; the first thing was that it was a very rainy night, and if my mother found in the morning that my shirt was wet, she would guess I had been up to mischief,

Stories Toto Told Me

and, having told my father, I should have nothing but stick for breakfast; and the second thing was that if some Cappuccino should be persuaded by an uneasy devil to look out of his window to see a naked boy running about in the orchard or in the churchyard, he would say to himself that it was just a poor soul escaping from purgatory, and then, having repeated a *De Profundis*, he would go back to his bed. So just as I was creeping across the yard with the warm rain pouring in torrents over my body, there came this banging on the door of my house, and I skipped behind a tree and waited. Then my father opened the window of his room upstairs, demanding what was the matter, and the voice of the servant of the respectable man, replied that *la Signora Pucci* had suddenly been taken very ill, and that if my mother was a Christian woman she would come to her assistance. This ser-

How Christians Love One Another

vant spoke with a very thick voice ; and as I did not think I was going to be amused if I stayed behind my tree, I ran away and enjoyed myself enough with the peaches belonging to these Cappuccini. When I came home I dried myself with a cloth, took my shirt from under the seat in the porch, and went to bed again. And in the morning when I awoke there was no one to give us our breakfast ; for my father was gone to his work, and my mother to the assistance of the wife of the respectable man ; so I was thankful enough that I had made so many good meals during the night. All that day, and all the next night, and the day after, was my mother away from her home ; and I need not tell you that I began to think that something very strange was happening, of which I ought to know ; so I waited here, and I waited there, and I put a question of one kind to this, and a question of another kind to that,

Stories Toto Told Me

and during the night, after my father had seen me go to bed, I got up again, left my shirt in the porch as before, not because it was raining now, but because I liked it, as well as for the other reason, and I wandered about quite naked and happy and free " (here he tossed his arms and wriggled all over in an indescribable manner), " dodging behind trees and bushes, from my father's house to the house of the respectable man, and to the churchyard of the convent of the Cappuccini; and during that night I saw many curious things; and these, with the answers which were given to the questions I had been asking, and other odds and ends, which I either knew, or had seen with my eyes, made me able to know exactly what this mystery was.

" Now I ought to have told you this, that a week before, a priest from the Jesuit college of which I have already spoken had been buried in the convent

How Christians Love One Another

churchyard; also he was the confessor of the wife of the respectable man, and a priest whom she held in the very greatest honour, and he was called Padre Guilhelmo Siretto. He was a saint indeed whom everybody venerated, for the Signor Iddio had made him live sixty-seven years in order that he might add to the many good deeds which in his long life he had done. I should like you to remember this, because now I must go to another part of the story.

After the servant of the respectable man had told my father that her mistress was ill, my mother arose from her bed and went at once to the house of the sick person. Arrived there, she found la Signora Pucci fallen upon the floor in great pain; and, being a woman herself, she knew with one stroke of her eye what was the matter.

Now the servant of the respectable

Stories Toto Told Me

man, who had accompanied my mother, was drunk, and so useless. Therefore my mother, who is the best of all women living, made la Signora Pucci as comfortable as she could at that time, went into the stable, put the horse into the cart, and, having driven for three miles to the nearest town, brought a doctor back with her as the day was breaking.

The sick woman was put to bed, and the doctor gave my mother directions as to what was to be done during his absence: for he said he must go home now to finish his night's rest, and in the morning he had his patients to see, but in the afternoon he would come again, and that then, perhaps, something would happen. But my mother told him that she would on no account consent to be left alone in the house with la Signora Pucci, because she perceived that something most astonishing was to happen. The doctor

How Christians Love One Another

replied that he would not stay, because he could not; and that if my mother was not there to assist the sick woman in her trouble, she might die. But my mother would by no means be persuaded, and in the end she conquered; and the doctor stayed, and they waited all through the night, and the next morning at noon there came a new baby into that house; and la Signora Pucci was so astonished that she really nearly died, and as for the baby, he did die after a half-hour of this world.

Then the sick woman became mad, and cried in delirium that she would not have it known to the respectable man, her husband, that a new baby had come into that house; so my mother went for the Fra Guardiano of these Cappuccini, telling him all that she knew, how she had baptized the baby herself, by the name Angelo, seeing that he was at the point of death, and

Stories Toto Told Me

that therefore he must be buried in the churchyard; and how his mother, la Signora Pucci, demanded that this should be done secretly, and that the grave should be made with Padre Guilhelmo, of whom I have told you before, who was a saint that any person might be glad to be buried with. Upon which the Fra Guardiano replied that this was as easy as eating; and he directed my mother, having put the dead baby into a box, to take the box under her cloak at midnight to the grave of Padre Guilhelmo. So she did as she was told, putting the dead baby Angelo into a wooden box in which rice had been, and cutting a cross upon the lid so that San Michele Arcangiolo should know there was a Christian inside; and at midnight she was there at the grave of Padre Guilhelmo. And, of course, I need not tell you that there was a naked boy hidden in a cedar tree, over her head,

How Christians Love One Another

lying flat upon his face upon a thick branch which he held between his thighs and with his arms, and looking right down upon the grave. Then there came out of the convent Fra Giovannone, Fra Lorenzo, Fra Sebastiano, and Fra Guilhelmo. And if I had not remembered that a naked boy in a cedar-tree was not one of the things which you are unable to do without at a midnight funeral, I should have laughed, because these friars, coming out of their convent without candles, fell over the crosses on the graves, and said things which friars do not say in their offices. They brought two spades and a bucket of holy water, and when they came to the grave of the Jesuit Padre, Fra Sebastiano and Fra Guilhelmo dug about three feet of a hole there; then my mother gave them the box from under her cloak, and they put it in the earth; and having sprinkled it with holy water,

Stories Toto Told Me

they covered it up, made the grave look as it had looked before, as best they could in that dim light, and then returned to their convent, all the time saying no word aloud.

Then my mother went back to the house of la Signora Pucci, and a boy without clothes followed her there. For one hour after I ran backwards and forwards secretly from the convent to the house of the respectable man, but finding that nothing else happened I went to my bed.

About the end of the day after this my mother returned to her house, and said that the doctor had brought a nurse to la Signora Pucci, and that the respectable man her husband also was coming back, so there was nothing more for her to do. Then she swooned with weariness, for she was tired to death; but having rested some days while I and my sisters

How Christians Love One Another

and my brothers kept the house clean and tidy, she recovered herself.

And that is all the tale, sir.

And I think you will see that these Capuccini, unless indeed they are entirely fools of the most stupid, and that they may be, have been urged on by envy of the Jesuit fathers to lay the beginnings of a plot which some day will cause a great scandal. You must see that they could not help the coming of the new baby Angelo to the house of the respectable man, and it is not for that that I blame them. You must see that when the new baby Angelo had come, and died a Christian, there was nothing else for them to do but to bury him in their churchyard; and that secretly, to defend la Signora Pucci from shame; and after all you must see that there are yards and yards and yards of ground in that churchyard where this dead Christian baby Angelo could be

Stories Toto Told Me

buried by himself secretly, and that it is simply abominable to have put him into the grave of a Jesuit, which, being opened, as it may at any time — God knows when or why, but it is quite likely — will bring a great dishonour and a foul blot upon the sons of Sant' Ignazio of Loyola."

I said that I saw.

Thus ended the sixth of the nine and forty Stories
Coto Cold Me : wherein been contained high
and great matters concerning the noble army of
martyrs and all the company of heaven with
other divers legends histories and acts as all along
hereafore is made mention. Which works I
have so far written down for the first time at
the commandment and request of my special
patron John Lane, and have finished at Cor-
vicastra in Aria on the feast of the good thief
Saint Dismas the year of Our Lord m viije
xc viij and the l xi year of the reign of Queen
Victoria. By me Baron Corvo. Printed for
John Lane by John Wilson & Son at the
University Press Cambridge Mass., in Au-
gust

m viije xc viij

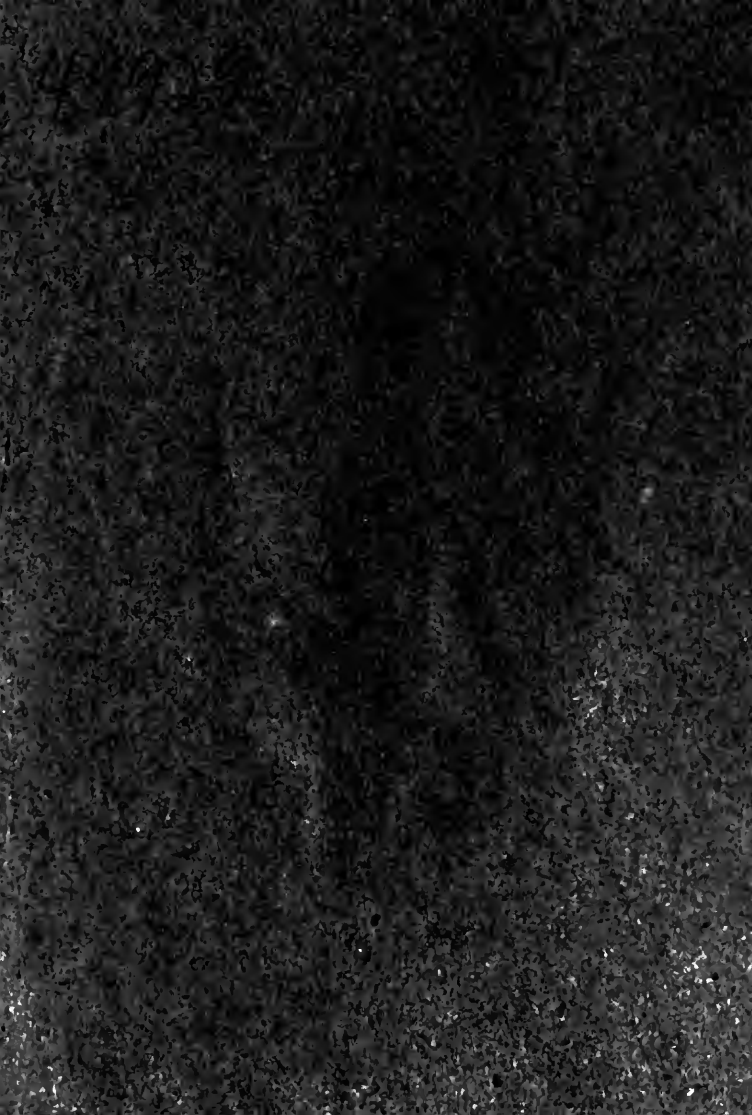












THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 001 051 226 7

